The Saint Extraordinary

BHAGAVAAN GOPINATH JI

His life and Message

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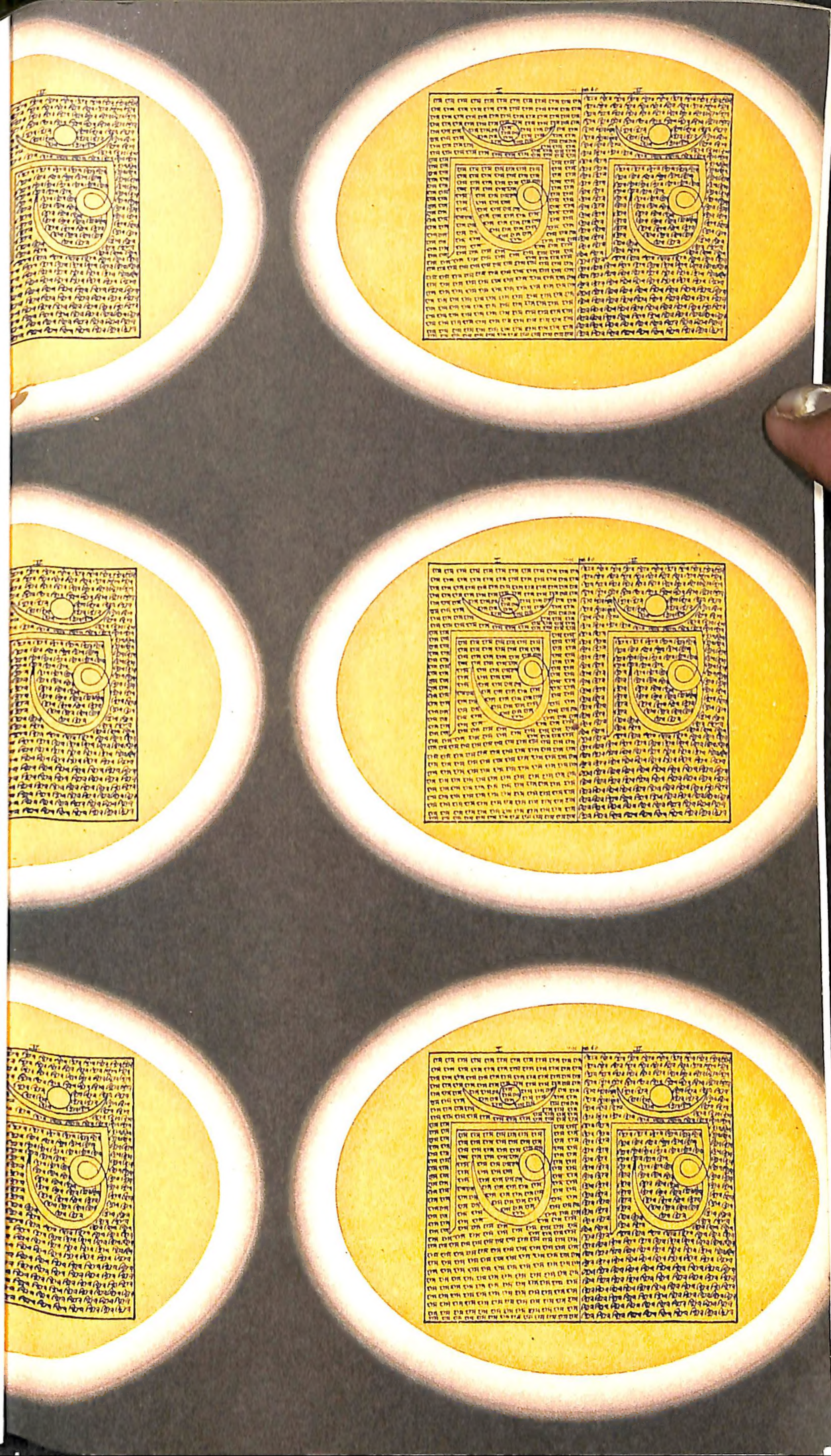
Triloki Nath Dhar, 'Kundan'



The Saint Extraordinary,
Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji
(His life and Message)

by

Triloki Nath Dhar, 'Kundan'

Jagat Guru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji
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Dedication

The book is dedicated to the devotees of Bhagavaan Ji,
who are engaged in 'Sadhana' for their own spiritual uplift and
'Seva' for the welfare of the mankind,
Who are pious of heart and pure of mind and
Who possess the qualities of
'sezar, Pazar and
Shozar'.

'Dhyanamulan gurormurtih, poojamulam guroh padam
Jnanamulam gurorvakyam mokshamulam guroh kripa'

(The portrait of the preceptor should be the centre of our meditation. The lotus feet of the preceptor should be the object of our worship. Whatever words of wisdom come out of the mouth of the preceptor should be taken as the roots of the true knowledge and his grace should be regarded as the key to emancipation.)

In all humility,
Triloki Nath Dhar 'Kundan'

॥ ॐ नमो भगवते गोपीनाथाय ॥

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Foreword

Hosh dim lagayo pamposhi-padan
Ha Sadan ha'ndi Sado ho

(O ye! The Saint of saints,
Give me awareness, I entreat.
I have placed my life
At the altar of your lotus-feet)

It was 3rd July 2002 and the occasion was 104th birthday (solar) celebration of our Master Bhagavaan Gopi Nath ji at Uttam Nagar, Delhi. A troupe of musicians from the Sangeet Sadhana Sadan was singing the above quoted lines from a popular Kashmiri hymn. The Principal of the institute was so overwhelmed that he stated that these lines appeared to have been composed and addressed specifically to this great saint. These lines opened up a floodgate of old memories in my mind. I was reminded of a number of occasions when Bhagavaan ji would ask me to stay overnight at his lotus feet. On these occasions Shri Badri Nath Khodbali, who resided in the same premises, would also join us. He would recite the same hymn up to the late hours, usually up to midnight in front of the Master.

I am one of those fortunate persons who have had lifelong association with 'Tathi Bab', as we fondly call the saint. I remember vividly the 2nd November 1947, when for the first time I had the privilege of receiving his '*Prasada*', brought by my father and my uncle late in the night from Reshi Mohalla near Habba Kadal in Srinagar, where the saint resided then. The following day Srinagar city was saved, with his kind intervention, from the tribal marauders who, aided and abetted by Pakistan, had invaded the state. As my revered father and uncle were regular visitors to the saint I got the opportunity of accompanying them frequently and receiving his blessings quite often. In due time, due to the sheer grace of the preceptor, '*Guru Kripa*', our family had to move temporarily from our ancestral house at Ali Kadal to the vicinity of the residence of Bab Maharaj. Our stay there lasted for about three years from 1967 to 1969. This proximity to the saint was God-

sent. It provided our family innumerable opportunities of remaining at his lotus feet, serving him, listening to him and receiving his benign grace. The celestial atmosphere of that place inspired my wife also to visit it regularly and pay her obeisance to the Master. On one such occasion, when I was already there, she came in and 'Tathi Bab' remarked that she was *Parvati*. Perhaps he saw Shiva in every man and Parvati in every woman. Even then giving this epithet to my wife was a special grace '*Anugrah*' of his, which has stood us in good stead all these years. Our entire family has received special benediction there up to the last moment when he left his mortal frame. Even now we feel his presence around us and pray to him to continue to be kind towards us and shower his grace on us.

I can vouch from my personal experience that Bhagavaan Ji is always there to help anybody who perseveres on the path of '*Sadhana*', quest after the truth. He has been ever at hand to help those who prayed for help and those who deserved his benign favours. He has proved to be 'Gopi Nath' in true sense and all that is needed for a devotee is to be a 'Gopi' and have the same unflinching love towards him as the 'Gopis' had towards Krishna. He is sure in that case to care for his devotee, guide him on the path of 'sadhana'. He is at such a spiritual state that a devotee has only to place him in his consciousness, meditate upon him and then his grace will flow like the sacred water of the Ganges. People have benefited from him materially and spiritually when he was physically present with us. People are benefiting from him even now when he guides them in his astral form. He is the source of constant solace and eternal bliss.

There are innumerable stories of devotion in our scriptures. Gopis were attached to Shri Krishna. Hanuman was devoted to Shri Ram. Parvati loved Shiva. Ahalya, Shabri, Draupadi and many others wholly depended on the Lord and sought refuge at His feet. In our time we have come across many devotees who have shown the same devotion towards our Master. Some chant his holy name, some sing in his praise and others meditate on him. All of them get elevated spiritually and secure a lasting peace of mind. Lord Shiva says in 'Guru Gita' that there is no spiritual position higher than that of the Guru, no penance better than serving him and no

knowledge greater than the knowledge of the reality acquired through him with his grace. A true devotee identifies himself with the entire creation and then meditates upon his Guru. The spiritual aspirant knows that nothing else is greater than that Supreme Being, who transcends the world of beings prone to degeneration, decay and death. It is this transcendental Supreme Truth that the aspirant is after and attains with the grace of Bab Maharaj.

We are fortunate to have a lot of literature on the life and message of Bhagavaan Ji. Shri S.N. Fotedar has written his biography. Prof. J.N.Sharma has revised that and also written many articles independently. Other erudite scholars and devotees of Bhagavaan Ji also have written a lot on him. Some have written about their experiences in relation to him and some have addressed their prayers to him. These devotee-writers include Prof A.N.Dhar, Shri B.N.Handoo Upkari, Shri Makhan Lal Kukiloo, Shri Chaman Lal Razdan, to name only a few. A lot more about him is still unknown. In fact many events connected with our Master are still unfolding and we come to know amazing accounts of fresh happenings denoting the ever presence of Bhagavaan Ji and his kindness to his devotees. Many devotees were, therefore, desirous of having another biography of the saint written differently with a different perspective. The Jagad Guru Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji Charitable Foundation approached Shri T.N.Dhar 'Kundan' with the request that he take up this job. We were thrilled and excited when this erudite scholar-writer accepted our request. We were aware of his qualification and knowledge, as he had already contributed well-written articles to the 'Patrika' and the 'Prakash Bhagavaan Gopi Nath', which were well received by the esteemed readers of these journals.

Shri 'Kundan' has done a good job and has produced a splendid biography of our Master in a record time. He has on the one hand studied him in the background of the galaxy of sages who form our sacred tradition and on the other hand has linked his words of spiritual wisdom to the pronouncements of various scriptures and texts from the corpus of the rich spiritual literature inherited by us. This splendid, superb and commendable work will no doubt be welcomed by one and all. He has very forcefully brought home to us, in the last chapter of the book, the need to

spread Bhagavaan Consciousness and bring every devotee under this sacred umbrella so that the mankind attains material peace and contentment and spiritual uplift and progress. We express our sincere gratitude to him for this labour of love, which he undertook in all seriousness that it deserved. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not make mention of Shri B.L.Kak, the daring and dedicated journalist, who brought to light the presence of Bhagavaan ji at Tiger Hills during the Kargil war of July 1999 and guiding our brave soldiers in capturing this all important hill feature. He was kind to go through the manuscript and then he and Dr. B.L.Pandit gave some valuable suggestions, which were by and large incorporated by the author. We thank both of them for these suggestions. We also thank all those devotees who were kind to send accounts of their own experience, in response to our appeal published in the 'Koshur Samachar' and the 'Prakash Bahagavaan Gopi Nath'.

With the grace of the Master, after the book is in the hands of the devotees, the Foundation would like to bring out translations in Hindi, Urdu and possibly some other languages as well, so that it reaches the wider public and non-English knowing persons as well.

With blessings, love and regards,

FF-26, Mangal Bazaar, Pran Nath Koul
Tikona Park, (opposite Mother Dairy Booth)
Luxmi Nagar,
Delhi - 110092

Preface

Asking for the Moon

Asit giri samam syat kajjalam sindhu patre
Surtaruvara shakha lekhni patramurvi
Likhati yadi grahitva Sharada sarvakalam
tadapi tav gunanam Isha param na yati
(Even if mountains of ink are dissolved in the inkpot of ocean,
Branches of the king of trees are used as a pen,
The entire earth is turned into a writing pad,
And the Goddess of Learning herself writes indefinitely,
God! Even then describing your attributes would not be possible.)

Soon after completing my studies I left Kashmir to join my services in the Central government. I lived in the planes and visited my home in Srinagar almost every third or fourth year. Surprisingly, neither in my student days nor thereafter during my short visits on holidays to the valley did I chance to hear or know about Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji. Therefore I was not lucky enough to have his darshan when he was in his gross body. I came to know of him first when I went to see a dear friend, Prof. Amar Nath Dhar, a pious person in his own right, at the Ashram at Pamposh enclave. This first visit to an Ashram established in the name of Bhagavaan Ji was a great spiritual experience for me. Till then the marble statue of Bhagavaan Ji had not been installed there. There was a life-size portrait of his in the pooja-hall and a *'Paduka'* in a separate enclosure. The hall was full of devotees singing hymns in praise of their beloved and chanting *'Om Namo Bhagavate Gopi Nathaya'*. I carry the impression of this visit vividly in my mind to this day. The gaze of the glittering eyes of the portrait was penetrating. The radiant light emanating from the shining forehead with a dazzling saffron-tilaka was captivating. The white big turban and the typical Kashmiri coloured *'Pheran'* worn by him were attracting. The half-open lips were eloquent and suggestive. There was something divine, pious and celestial about him that made the whole atmosphere seeped into spirituality, lifting this sacred

hall out of this world to the heavens above. The attraction was so magnetic that I was easily and naturally drawn towards him. During this visit to the 'Ashram' I added another name to the list of my friends, that of Pt. Pran Nath Koul, who was the Secretary of Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji Trust and is a great devotee of the saint. Through these two gentlemen, Prof. Dhar and Shri Koul I came to know something about him and also got some literature connected with him. Earlier I had been informed about the journal 'Patrika' published by the Trust and had the good fortune of contributing some articles on spiritual topics to its various issues.

The study of the material relating to Bhagavaan Ji was so fascinating that soon I felt as if I had known this noble and pious personality for ages. I read about his life with interest. I reflected on the words of wisdom that were uttered by him on various occasions and was lost in the depth of their meaning and vastness of their purport. I was intrigued by this saint, whose silence was more eloquent than the long and flowery discourses of many god men. Nobody could figure out whether he was angry or benign when he threw a pair of tongs on someone. Nobody could make out what he spoke in whispers at times or with whom he spoke. Some were bewildered to see him smoke the 'Chillum' with tobacco and other intoxicants. Some were astonished to see him devour non-vegetarian dishes. Some were awe-stricken to note his eccentricities of fasting at times for months together and eating huge quantities of food at other times. Some were wonder struck to see him accept liquor from his devotees, have it distributed and consume some of it. Some observed him gazing towards the skies above, lost in the world of his own. Some saw him pouring oblations into the burning fire of his '*Dhooni*'. Some noted his indifference to his own physical needs and many were baffled to find him speak about things that were in their own mind and thought. Sometimes one could not figure out the purport of what he said nor understand to whom it was referred. Some people got answers to their questions directly and some indirectly. Some did not get any response while some got solutions to their problems. Yet every one was eager to bow before his lotus feet and receive some '*Prashada*' and a pinch of '*Bhasma*' or the holy ash that was ambrosia for their ailments. In fact his entire life on this planet has been mysterious.

He had to change his residence nearly a dozen times. He had had a modest education from today's standards but he had profound knowledge of conventional spiritual texts like Bhagavad Gita, Guru Gita, Bhawani Sahasranam, Panchastavi and Mahimnastotra. He was fond of visiting saints and shrines. He enjoyed listening to classical music presented with the accompaniment of Kashmiri musical instruments like Santoor and Saaz. I ventured to write a few articles on his life and message. These were very kindly published by Professor Dhar in the '**Patrika**' – now renamed '**Shuddha Vidya**', the publication of Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Trust and by Prof. B.L.Pandit in the '**Prakash Bhagavaan Gopi Nath**', the prestigious quarterly journal brought out by the Foundation. Both Prof. Dhar and Prof. Pandit are deeply religious personalities driven to spirituality in a big way. Their own writings in prose and poetry are full of spiritual wisdom and unwavering devotion.

A lot has been written about Bhagavaan Ji, a lot more is still unknown about him and yet to be written. We have a very well written biography authored by one of his close devotees, Pt. S.N.Fotedar. We have a lot of material by way of information given out and revealed by his closest devotees like Pt. Pran Nath Kaul – he has dedicated his life in the service of the Master. We have accounts of the personal experiences of persons of faith that they had during his lifetime as also after his '*Mahanirvana*'. Bhagavaan Ji never stepped out of Kashmir Valley, yet he is a saint of all times and all places. That was in keeping with what the 'Brihad Aranyak Upanishad' says, 'the gods always play where lakes are, where the Sun's rays are warded off by the umbrellas of lotus leaf clusters and where clear water paths are made by swans, whose breasts toss the white lotuses hither and thither; where swans, ducks, curlews and paddy birds are heard and animals rest nearby in the shade of Nicula trees on the river banks'. There was no distinction of caste, creed or faith for him. In fact he had transcended time and space. He had a world-view of the contemporary problems relating to the spirit of the mankind. He had a cure for all ailments and right medicine for every type of ills. He would come to the rescue of every single person who remembered him or knocked at his door with unflinching faith. He would take the responsibility of

defending the frontiers of the country whenever the enemies waged a war against us and attacked our motherland. He would even guide the army in the matter of strategic actions, assaults, moves and counter moves.

Therefore, when I was asked to write his biography I was taken by surprise. How could one write about such a mysterious and a charismatic saint? I was baffled, would I be able to count the stars? Was it possible to find the beginning of the beginning-less? Was it within my competence to touch the skies, fathom the depths of the oceans or measure the circumference of the horizon? To ask me to write his biography was asking for the Moon. I had half a mind to decline this near impossible onorous task. Then instantaneously I was reminded of a *'Shloka'* of the *'Soundarya Lahari'* wherein even the great Shankaracharya has acknowledged that it is the Mother Goddess who herself describes her own features, her own beauty, her own qualities and her own attributes. It is not possible for anyone else to undertake this task. *'Tvadiyabhir-vagbhis-tava Janani vacham stutir-iyam-* this hymn unto you Mother! Is couched in your words only'. Therefore it occurred to me who was I to write about him. I was sure he would write himself, describe himself and narrate himself whatever he desired to be recorded, revealed and stated through me. I have to be a *'Nimmitta-matra'* just a means, a tool only. I have only to pray to him for ethereal bliss and wondorous beauty so that the task is completed according to his ordain. On this realization I readily accepted the task and requested the members of Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji Foundation to provide me with necessary material, authentic information and the relevant literature. Accordingly an appeal was issued through the *'Koshur Samachar'* and the *'Prakasha Bahagavaan Gopi Nath'* requesting the devotees to write to us about their personal experiences and relevant information relating to Bhagavaan Ji based on their own knowledge. Many devotees sent informative write ups in response to this appeal. Many narrated incidents and anecdotes in person. Some have stated many things on the condition of anonymity and some would not mind being quoted.

There were lots of incidents and occurrences, which were revealed by some and corroborated by others. More than one person has described many things about him, in different ways according

to the perception and understanding of each one of them. Basic information about him is no doubt provided by the biography written by Shri Fotedar. This information is added to and supplemented by the writings of Prof. J.N. Sharma and B.N.Handoo 'Upkari' and by the graphic account of the minute details narrated by Shri Pran Nath Koul, a pious and spiritually enlightened person who has been very close to him. Many a devotee has provided details of what he experienced after Bab Bhagavaan's *'Nirvana'* in 1968 and what was perceived through his astral form. Notable among them are Philip Simpfendorfer of Australia, Shri Autar Tikou of Switzerland, Justice S.N.Katju, Journalist Shri B.L.Kak, Musician Shri Daleep Langoo and others. Some of the near relatives of Bhagavaan Ji also provided us with some details about his life and activities through the good offices of Pran Nath Ji, who has been extremely helpful in this otherwise stupendous project. All this information was no doubt useful to write this biographical account. There were, however, differences of opinion on some matters of importance. Many devotees and scholars differ about his Guru. Many have different views about the method of worship he adopted, practised and preached. I am aware that there are two sources of evidences, *'Bahya sakhsha'* or external evidence and *'Antah sakhsha'* or internal evidence. Since external evidence is conflicting and does not prove to be conclusive, I had to take recourse to internal evidence in respect of these controversial issues. Even so people need not agree with my conclusions nor need there be any controversy in this regard. After all we are trying to know the Master, understand his message and derive personal benefit from all this in mundane as also spiritual terms. How does it, therefore, matter who his preceptor had been and why should one worry about the method of spiritual pursuit finally perfected and adopted by him to know the truth.

With these reflections my initial hesitation was gone. I recalled the oft-quoted shloka in praise of the Divine, *'Mookam karoti vachalam pangum langayate girim, yat kripa tam aham vande Paramananda Madhavam* – I bow to Madhava, the apostle of the supreme bliss, who makes the dumb speak and the crippled and disabled able to cross the mountains by His grace'. I was confident that his grace would strengthen my resolve and guide my pen in

writing his own story. He would not let me down and would perfect my writing. He would provide me with necessary expression, relevant details and insight into his mysterious life so that whatever I pen down now will eventually give inspiration to devotees, solace to the suffering and raise all of us to the plane of divinity.

It, however, occurred to me that Bhagavaan Ji's life and teachings should not be studied in isolation. We have had a long and rich tradition of sages, savants and saints. Some have lived a pious life and left behind examples of piety worth emulating. Some have left for us profound literature, original texts, treatises and commentaries on scriptures. Some have written poetry full of Knowledge and devotion. Some have had a host of disciples and some have preferred to remain in a low profile. The mysterious incidents relating to most of them have come down to us by the word of mouth. Some happenings are available in print, written by contemporary persons or those who came to know about these during their lifetime from their elders and other sources. I thought all this should find place in this biographical account to the extent it sheds light on the life and teachings of the Master and helps us see him in the right perspective. After all he has carried forward the tradition of sainthood of Kashmir, the hermitage established by the great Kashyapa. I was, however, conscious of the fact that something had to be done by me also in order to be able to do justice to this venture and that was to be at rest with myself. I had read these lines of Dag Hammarskjold, ' When we come to a point of rest in our own being we encounter a world where all things are at rest, and then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud becomes a revelation and each person we meet a cosmos whose riches we can only glimpse'. It was this mystery, this revelation and this cosmos that I was venturing to glimpse while writing about the Master and for this I needed to be at rest with my being all the time.

I was also vividly aware that the following statement made by a Western thinker about God was equally applicable in this case where I was required to write about a mysterious saint, who was himself a partial incarnation if not full incarnation with all the sixteen '*Kalas*' of the Divine: 'Without God's self-revelation few people would possess knowledge of God. Some people simply do not have the natural disposition to arrive at knowledge of God

through the strenuous exercise of reason; not every body is cut out to be a Philosopher. Others are too busy with such matters as earning a living and just don't have time to think speculatively about divine matters. Still others are just too lazy to think their way to knowledge of God. Besides all this a trained intellect is not easily attained. Our minds are limited and prone to error and we can inadvertently fall into falsehood in our thinking'. I was, therefore, fully convinced that unless Bhagavaan Ji revealed himself it would be well nigh impossible for me to write about his life and message. So I all the time invoked his blessings.

There are parallels between what he said and did in his times and what his predecessor saints said and stood for. There are similarities between his sayings and the prescriptions in our ancient scriptures and spiritual texts. These parallels and similarities, I thought, need to be highlighted to clarify the '*Veda-vakya*', saying of the Vedas, '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti* – The Truth is one and the wise express it in a variety of ways.' Yudhishthir has stated about '*Dharma*' or the universal truth and duty this: '*Shrutir-vibhinnah Smritir-vibhinnah Dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayam, Mahajano yena gatah sa panthah* – The revealed scriptures and the derived scriptures have differently explained '*Dharma*'. The true essence is deep rooted and, therefore, the best course is to emulate the great emancipated souls.'

This opportunity to write the Master's story provided to me by the Foundation, for which I am grateful to them, had another meaning for me. I took it as compensation, and a satisfying one at that, for me for not having had the good fortune of seeing him in his embodied form. It was an occasion for me to make an in-depth study of his life and spiritual message and simultaneously derive pleasure in going through the related literature. It provided me the time to reflect on all this fund of knowledge in order to take lessons for my own spiritual uplift. It was of immense personal value for me to get to know about all those who have been so close to him, all those fortunate ones who have served him, all those lucky ones who have received his grace or have had interaction with him in his astral form. I bow in reverence before all of them in all humility and before those who are engaged in the service of the mankind in his name. Let this lamp remain ever bright and let a

million lamps get lighted from the immortal flame of *'Jnana'* and *'Vichara'* (Knowledge and contemplation) of this eternally lighted lamp. Let this fraternity of Bhagavaan Ji's devotees be a spiritual family with deep-rooted bonds of love and a mutual relationship of concern and care. For every long journey we have to take the first step. If this small attempt of mine inspires them to take this first step, I shall consider that my effort was worthwhile.

I do not claim to know much about the sages and savants of our land. However, I have read some account of the life and teachings of the saints of the Bhakti movement from Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the West to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the East. I have read the enchanting Bhakti poetry of the whole era, from Surdas and Tulsidas to Meera and Raskhan. I am in the know of, as every ordinary Kashmiri is, the *Vakhs* of Lal Ded, *Shruks* of Nunda Rishi and the *'Rahasyopdesha'* of Roop Bhawani. I have studied the mystic devotional and spiritual poetry of Sufi poets, Shams Faqir, Swachha Kral, Nyama Saeb, Wahab Khar, Shah Gafoor and others as also that of Paramananda, Krishna Razdan, Prakash Ram etc. In my childhood I have heard about the great saints, Krishna Kar, Reshi Peer, Meesha Sahib, Shakar Shah and others. I have also met some saints like Kash Kak, Mathura Devi, Rehman Saeb, Swami Laxman Joo and others when I was very young. I have been a student of Sanskrit that has given me some insight into our religious scriptures and a glimpse of the corpus of philosophical texts written by great Rishis of yore. The Bhagavad Gita has been of special interest to me and I have studied different commentaries on it. This background has been useful for me to try and understand this mysterious saint of Kashmir to some extent and to venture to draw my own conclusions from the events of his life. It is for the readers to decide how far these conclusions are plausible and convincing. This exercise of writing about Bab Bhagavaan has by itself strengthened my faith in this Universal Saint. My respect for those who are engaged in their own spiritual uplift and in the service of people in his name has increased and redoubled over the period. I have no doubt in my mind that Bhagavaan Ji was a *'Siddha'*, a spiritually accomplished soul. Shri Krishna has said in the Gita, *'Siddhanam Kapilo Munih-* among the accomplished souls I am Kapil Muni'. I am convinced that in his future incarnation the Lord will

say, *'Siddhanam Gopinatho'ham* –among the accomplished souls I am Gopi Nath'. This belief of mine is based on the fascinating account of the life of this mysterious saint that I came to know and read during this period of writing this biographical book on him. I am fully confident that the resolve of spreading 'Bhagavaan Consciousness' will gain from strength to strength. It will soon become a universal movement for the benefit of the mankind and it will unite the forces of peace, piety and progress to overcome the evil design of division and destruction. Bhagavaan Ji is there to guide us in this endeavour and he will oversee and bless our efforts to ensure that these are heading in the right direction.

Blessed is the valley of Kashmir, the very soil of which is considered sacred. The hills and mountain-peaks, rivers and springs, meadows and gardens of this land are hallowed by the memory of saints and sages as also shrines dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti. It has been a seat of learning in the past and has produced erudite scholars, profound doctrines, texts on all branches of knowledge and a life style, which is at once pure, pious and simple. The people have been God-fearing by nature, religious in attitude, humble in demeanour and peace loving in character. They are naturally drawn towards holy men and women and are used to visiting temples and shrines habitually. Fasting on important days of religious significance, distributing yellow rice, *'Tahar'* and sweet pan-cake *'Poorya'* on auspicious days, nightlong singing hymns and *Bhajans* and collective *'Aarti'* at important shrines of pilgrimage, circumambulation of the Hari Parvat and performing *yajnas* on various festivals are the common features of the life of an ordinary Kashmiri Pandit. It is not, therefore, surprising that Kashmir has produced a large number of saints and sages. In fact saints like Bhagavaan Ji must have at will chosen this pious land for taking birth here. He was an ardent believer in the Bhagavad Gita, which says 'when one sees everything as his own self and sees himself in everything else, such a unitive vision makes one feel the happiness of others as his own. The empathetic craving to increase the quantum of other's happiness and reduce their sorrow comes naturally to one who has this integral experience'. No wonder, therefore, our Babji was benign, caring, kind and compassionate when it came to mitigating the pain and suffering

of the people. He was firm in his belief that it was spirituality that would cater to all the needs of the mankind and that a firm resolve, untiring effort and the divine grace were essential ingredients to attain the goal of emancipation. I would like to quote what Dr. Sundaram has written about Shankara since this passage perfectly relates to our Master also, description of whose life and message is the subject matter of this book. He says:

- 'Sankara speaks with a sense of urgency. Truth is to be seen and possessed in one's lifetime. The wisdom is to be here and now. This is his ideal of '*Jeevanmukti*'. He wants, in other words, the world to be the place governed by the vision of unity and practice of love that is born of it. He has no sympathy for the barren speculation of abstract metaphysics. The task of redemption is immediate and the most imperatively practical. Transcendence of divisive barriers and transformation of awareness into an all-encompassing charity are the burden of Sankara's call to humanity.'

I am grateful to all those who have contributed directly or indirectly to the writing of this book by providing the details and relevant information about the saint. I place on record my humble gratitude to Late Fotedar Sahib, who has done a great service in writing about his preceptor. He deserves our '*Pranam*' and accolades for writing Bhagavaan Ji's biography, which throws light on his life and spiritual message. The present book is an attempt to offer one more floral tribute to the Jagad Guru by way of this biographical account of his and thereby I have ventured to join the rank and file of the devotees who are dedicated to carry forward his mission of spiritual uplift and moral advancement as also service of the fellow men. In the end, I would address Bhagavaan Ji in the same words in which Adi Sankara has addressed the Mother Goddess:

> "Let my speech be thy praise, let all my gestures be signs of thy worship; let all my movements be circumambulation; let all my eating be the oblation; let my lying down be the prostration; let all that I do besides be my constant homage as I have surrendered my all unto thee."

I place this compilation, which is the collective effort of many

a devotee, before the lotus feet of the Master in all humility and with utmost devotion, with the hope that he will accept this humble offering, treating it as a basket of flowers from all of us. *'Tvadiyam vastu Govinda tubhyam-eve samarpaye* - This belongs to you my Lord and it is being dedicated to you'. Every paragraph of every chapter in this book has been written after taking his name and invoking his blessings to guide and direct my pen as he wished the narration to be. I hope that it will provide inspiration to all the readers to ponder over the basic questions, 'who I am, whence did I come and what is the purpose of my life?' I am confident that they will get into the higher spiritual plane of Bhagavaan Consciousness and find answers to all these questions. This will give them lasting joy in worldly and spiritual spheres of their lives. In the process I may also be fortunate enough to receive the grace of the Master.

T.N.Dhar 'Kundan'

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CHAPTER I

Birth of the Bhagavaan

Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharata!
Abhyuthanam-adharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham.
(Whenever the virtue is on the descend and
the vice is on the ascend, I take birth)

After draining the waters of Satisar with due penance at the instance of his son Nila, it was the desire of the great Kashyap Rishi to make Kashmir a haven for Rishis and convert this holy land into a hermitage. No wonder, therefore that every household in Kashmir has given birth to a sage. It is the unique feature of Kashmir that whereas every mountain peak is celestial, every spring is sacred and every nook and corner is a place of pilgrimage, every village and every township has produced a sage of eminence. Consequently a great number of *'Grihasta Sadhus'*, household ascetics have lived in this pious land. They have given spiritual guidance and mental peace to a host of their devotees and others from time to time. Some of them have composed mystical and devotional poems in a variety of forms, *Bhajans, Leelas* (Hymns in praise of God), *Vakhs, Shrukhs* (Quatrains containing moral and spiritual message) and so on. The message they gave was one of righteousness, piety, purity and penance. In the Hindu period of our history there have been great scholar-sages from Vasugupta, Utpaldev, Somanand and down to Abhinavgupta, and others, who propounded the world famous Trika philosophy – a monistic doctrine unique in many ways. They wrote original texts, treatises and commentaries in Sanskrit notably Spanda Karika, Shivastotravali, Shiva Drishti, Parmarthasara, Tantralok and the like.

From the fourteenth century onwards and with the advent of Islam, we have had saints who wrote or preached through the medium of Kashmiri language. At the head of this list is the great Lal Ded who was followed by Nunda Rishi, Roopa Bhawani, Paramananda, Krishna Razdan, and others. There were quite a few Muslim Sufis as well, notable among them being, Swachha Kral, Rahman Dar, Shah Gafoor, Waza Mehmood, Shamas Faqir, Wahab

Khar, Nyama Sahib, Asad Paray and Ahad Zargar. Kashmiris sing their compositions with reverence and devotion and these provide light and guidance. There, however, have been other saints and sages, who may not have written or composed any text or any poetry but they have guided many a seeker and provided solace to the suffering humanity. Some of these holy men revered and remembered by all Kashmiris are Krishna Kar, Reshi Peer, Sona Kak, Jeevan Shah, Kash Kak, Nanda Bab, Swami Nanda Lal, Grata Bab, Mathura Devi, Swami Laxman Joo, Shankar Razdan. In this galaxy of stars there appeared a shining Pole star called Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji, who in his lifetime got the title ***'Jagad Guru'*** or the preceptor of the world. He was born towards the end of Nineteenth century and lived in Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir State throughout his life.

Srinagar city is situated on either bank of the river Vitasta, also known as Jehlum. This river is the lifeline of the valley and sprouts forth from the spring of Verinag. Its source is known in local language as 'Vethavotur' and is a sacred place of pilgrimage. In olden days the two sides of this river were connected in Srinagar by seven bridges, now there are nine. Between the second and the third bridges, on the right bank there is a densely populated area called 'Bhana Mohalla.' As the name itself indicates the mohalla is named after the family of Bhans, who lived in this area. Shri Lachhman Joo Bhan, a Wazir Wazaarat (present day Collector) in the Revenue Department of the Dogra Mahar̄aja lived here. His son Pandit Narayan Joo Bhan was married to Shrimati Haara Maal, daughter of Pt. Prasad Joo Parimoo and the couple were blessed with a son on the 19th Ashada 1955 (Vikrami) corresponding to 3rd of July 1898 AD, who was named Gopi Nath and in course of time was to be known as Jagad Guru Bhagavaan Gopi Nath. There is an unconfirmed report that sometime before his birth Swami Vivekananda, who was in Kashmir then, had paid a visit to that place. Some say that he called on the family and others say he stopped short of entering the house and sat on a tailor's shop below it. Coming events cast their shadow before. Probably Swami Ji was aware that a great and a pious soul was going to be born there. Sometime around that time in 1898 was born Ronald Nixon in Cheltenham, UK, who came to India in 1921, became a *Sanyasi,* a

monk and was eventually known as Shri Krishnaprem Vairagi, a worthy disciple of Yashoda Ma. Two years earlier in 1896 were born A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the founder of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON and Anandamayi Ma, who was referred to as 'the purest flower the soil of India has ever produced' by Swami Sivananda Saraswati, the founder of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh.

Obviously there was something celestial about the last decade of the Nineteenth Century. It is no surprise, therefore, that Bhagavaan Ji should have been born in this auspicious decade. His father Pandit Narayan Joo was a highly religious person, a devout and spiritually very elevated. He dealt with Pashmina wool business. That he was a pious person of highest order devoid of any greed and coveting is clear from the fact that he gave up his ancestral home at Bhana Mohalla and other possessions inherited from his father, in favour of his stepmother and her children. Himself he shifted to the house of Pandit Shiv Ji Khyberi in Bhana Mohalla itself, along with his family including young Gopi Nath Ji, about ten years of age. He had two other sons. The elder one Pt. Govind Joo Bhan remained a bachelor. He worked in the Customs and Excise department and died in 1946. The younger one, Pt. Jia Lal was given in adoption to a family of Kaks at Sathu Barbarshah. He was married but had no issues. He was a draftsman in the State PWD and died in the year 1964. He too was spiritually inclined and would always be seen engaged in the service of Sadhus and the poor and downtrodden. At the time of his death Bhagavaan Ji is said to have remarked that the departed soul had merged with the Divine and, therefore, it was not surprising that he had given up his gross body. This is an indication enough that he too was spiritually at a very high level – a typically household sage, 'Grihasti-Sadhu'.

Shrimati Haara Maal, Bhagavaan Ji's mother was the daughter of Pandit Prasad Joo Parimoo, who lived at Sekidafer. He was also a saint in his own right. He and Swami Anand Ji of Jamanagari, Shopian were the disciples of the same Guru and Pandit Parimoo was considered to be spiritually so profound that he was fondly called 'Zada Bharata' after 'Jada Bharata', the legendary saint of the Puranas. It is said that in the beginning he had no issues and,

therefore, he adopted a son, Madhav Joo. Soon thereafter he had a vision of Shri Rajna Bhagavati while in samadhi at Tula Mula shrine. The Bhagavati chided him for having gone for adoption when she herself was desirous of taking birth in his house. Eventually Haara Mal was born, who was to give birth to Bhagavaan Ji in course of time. This reminds one of the great Saint of 17th century, Pt. Madhav Joo Dhar who begged of Goddess Sharika to favour him with a daughter like her. She agreed and took birth in his house to be known as 'Alakheshwari Roop Bhawani', a sage of all times who gave the divine discourse in the form of 'Rahasyopdesha'. In due course Shri Parimoo, the grandfather of Bhagavaan Ji had two more daughters, Badar Ded and Zapaer Ded and two sons, Bhagawan Das and Dama Kak. Holding '*Satsang*' or spiritual meetings was a matter of routine in their house. Prasad Joo initiated his younger daughter, Zapaer Ded into 'Japa-yoga' himself as a result of which she was recognized as an accomplished saint when she was around fifty years of age. His son, Pandit Bhagawan Das Parimoo was a devotee of Bhagavati Sharika and would go to Hari Parbat daily for circumambulation. Teaching of the scriptures like 'Yoga Vaasishtha' of Patanjali was a regular feature in their house. He would also go to 'Pokhribal' at the foothill of Haari Parvat towards the exit gate of Kathi Darwaza and return by dawn to his home. The spring at 'Pokhribal' used to be desilted once or twice every year. The young Gopi Nath would undertake this job. He would descend into the spring and remove the silt, mud, rotten flowers and other offerings from its bottom to clean the water. He would also attend the annual yajna at this sacred shrine. These activities of his showed that the seeds of spirituality and religious bent of mind were ingrained in the young lad from the very childhood.

Bhagavaan Ji had thus, it appears, inherited religious discipline, yoga practices, sainthood and spiritual atmosphere from his mother's side, Whereas his mother was an incarnation of Bhagavati Rajna, his grandfather, his aunt and his maternal uncle, all were initiated saints and devout practitioners of religious rituals. Periodical religious meetings, 'Satsang' had made the whole atmosphere in their house divine and pious. The atmosphere in his own house also was strictly religious as his father was at a high spiritual level, his elder brother practised celibacy throughout his

life and the younger one was also given to service of Sadhus. No wonder, therefore, that he was drawn to *'Dharma sadhana'* or the religious pursuit from the early age and as a young boy took pleasure in doing pious jobs as service unto the Divine. Mundane activities and normal household life did not, therefore, interest him at all. He developed aversion to sense objects and became indifferent to food, clothing and other means of comfort. This was manifest in his attitude in later years of his life. It is well said that coming events cast their shadows before. The seeds of his future exalted spiritual position were sown in his young age itself. Yet he was not given to ostentation or exhibitionism and remained throughout a silent and hidden seeker. He spoke very little and that too in low whispers and remained engrossed with the spiritual world of his own although outwardly appearing to be very much in this mundane world. He would seldom address any visitor directly. The conversion would either be indirect or through gestures.

Bhagavaan Ji had two sisters. The sister elder to him was Deva Maali. She gave birth to two daughters and was widowed at a young age. Probably the destiny had willed that she should be free from the worries of her own family so that she gave her full attention to sustain Bhagavaan Ji during the period of his rigorous *'Sadhanaa'* or the spiritual pursuit. She remained with him for a major portion of his life, taking care of his food, clothing and well being, till she died in 1965. She was with him during pilgrimages and occasionally on his visits to some prominent saints of the time. Her elder daughter, Shrimati Kamala Ji was married to Pt. Shyam Lal Malla and the couple got one son and two daughters. It was in their house at Chandapora that Bhagavaan Ji spent the last eleven years of his life and gave up his mortal frame in 1968. The younger daughter, Chanda Ji was married to Pt. Madhav Joo Sathu. Bhagavaan Ji stayed in their house at Rishi Mohalla for ten years before moving to the house of Mallas in 1956. Bhagavaan Ji's younger sister was Shrimati Janaki Devi. She died at a young age after giving birth to two sons and two daughters. She was also devoted to her brother and used to serve him on various occasions.

Living in *'Vangaejvore'* (hired houses with or without rentals), moving from house to house, losing near and dear ones and the

resultant turmoil made this young boy vividly aware of the frivolity of the worldly matters and the need to strive to know the Supreme Truth. Consequently he became an introvert. It is because of these traits and the fact that from his childhood itself he was not open and communicative that many people have observed that there were no signs of sainthood in him in his younger days. He had inherited piety and spiritual bent of mind both from his father and mother's side. The seeds of *'Saadhana'* were there and the deprivation, turmoil and grief that he experienced made these seeds sprout and he chose a path of sainthood that was destined for him. No doubt the cumulative virtue *'Sanchit punya'* of the previous many births had a big role to play in shaping his spiritual life. Without the intrinsic qualities of sainthood and the inclination towards *'sadhana'* carried over from the previous births, the turmoil would only have caused depression and turned him an escapist and would not have given rise to the positive aptitude towards seeking the Divine.

He must have been around ten years of age when his father shifted from his ancestral home to the house of Pt. Shiv Ji Khyberi in the same area, Bhana Mohalla. He had given up his palatial three-storeyed ancestral house and property in favour of his stepmother and her children. The family lived there for about one and a half years. In 1909 they moved to the house of Pt. Keshav Joo Nagri in Shaalayar where they lived for three years. These were the days of schooling for the young Gopi, who passed the middle standard, which at that time was of good reckoning. It was here that he lost his mother when he was just twelve years of age. In 1912 the family moved to Razverkadal house of Pt. Kailash Joo Bhan. During this period Bhagavaan Ji joined his maternal uncle in Pashmina wool business for some time. Thereafter he took employment with Vishi Nath Printing Press as a compositor. This engagement continued for three years and in between the family again shifted to Sekidafer in his maternal grandfather's house. His sojourn here seems to have intensified his spiritual activities. Earlier he used to visit the saint Zana Kak and now he would press the feet of the Jatadhari saint Balak Kaw, fondly known as Bal Ji. The family stayed at Sekidafer for seven years. His stint with the local press lasted just three years and then he started a grocer's shop at a place called 'Chaidob'. In 1920 the family took up residence at Safa Kadal in the house of

Pt. Keshav Joo Dhar. Bhagavaan Ji shifted his Kiryana shop to Sekidafer. He formed a group of young friends and as the leader of the group arranged occasional trips to holy places like Tula Mula, Vitsarnag, and Mahadev. He was fond of going to various saints, meeting them and having their darshan. It is possible that during these meetings he might have been discussing the problems encountered by him as a seeker in his quest for the Divine and sought answers to his queries. Alas these secret conversations are not made public and, therefore, one has just to presume what must have transpired between these sages. Surely they would not talk about worldly matters unless the topic veered round the good of the mankind at large.

It is not uncommon in Kashmir that a sage is born in an apparently ordinary household. There is a saying in Kashmiri, '*Lembi chhu pamposh phatan*' meaning that a lotus grows in muddy waters. We have had a galaxy of such saints, both men and women. In 14th century we had the great saint-poetess Lal Ded whose '*Vakhs*' or sayings are on the tip of every one's tongue. We have had Roop Bhawani in the 18th century who was an incarnation of Goddess Sharika. We had Krishna Kar, the illustrious preceptor of another great saint, Rishi Peer, who was called 'Peer Pandit Padshah, Mushkil Kusha har du jahan' meaning a King of saints capable of removing all the difficulties of both the worlds, here and beyond. In the contemporary scene also we had big names like Kash Kak, Nanda Bab, Grata Mo't, Mathura Devi, Sati Ded et al. In the lineage of Kashmir Shaiva Philosophy luminaries we had Vasu Gupt, Utpal Dev, Somanand, Abhinav Gupt, Swami Ram, Swami Mahtab Kak and Swami Laxman Joo. They have left behind a treasure of literature expounding the tenets of the unique 'Trika' Philosophy of this pious land. This basically a non-dualistic philosophy, propounds that the whole creation is the manifestation of the Divine and is, therefore, real and not an illusion. It comprises thirty-six elements and the spiritual quest consists in moving from objectivity to subjectivity or vice versa and attaining the position where the two get merged. In this doctrine the Divine is perceived as the Supreme Universal Consciousness, which manifests itself in the form of the creation with the help of its own inseparable energy aspect out of its own free will. Kashmir has been fertile enough to give birth to saints like Bhagavaan Gopi Nath, who during his

lifetime got the epithet of 'Jagat Guru', the Preceptor of the World. To his numerous disciples he was 'Bab', the loving father. Some of his disciples have fondly called him 'Bab Bhagavaan' or the God father and God father no doubt he was to his numerous devotees and fortunate persons who gained proximity to him. He was their ultimate hope for support, succour and spiritual guidance. He continues to provide this support in his astral form even now to the people in various nooks and corners of the globe. His birthday and Nirvana day are celebrated every year throughout the length and breadth of the country and abroad with devotion and dedication.

Bhagavaan Ji is as radiant as the Sun. He is as cool and soothing as the Moon. He is deep as an ocean and vast as the sky. He is ever fresh as the morning dew. He provides shelter like a huge Bunyan tree. Whenever we see his portrait, picture or statue a strange kind of magnetic attraction is felt. We are drawn to him by the intensity of the gaze of his eyes. It is as penetrating as the rays of the morning sun entering a closed room through the mesh windows. It is so enchanting as the sight of the rising sun from behind the mountain peaks. It is so captivating as the thousand flowers of all hues blossoming simultaneously. We are drawn towards him because of the attraction of his half open lips, which are eloquent enough to give an impression that they are reciting 'Richas' of the Rig Veda or singing 'Sama' of the Sama Veda or uttering the eternal seed syllable 'Om'. Incidentally he was himself very fond of Shastriya Sangeet or the classical music. We are drawn to him due to the radiance reflected from his glittering countenance and the splendour and grace radiating from his white turban and coloured 'Pheran'. This radiance spreads throughout the atmosphere around and envelops the entire audience. We are also drawn to him by the fountain of lights sprouting forth from the vermilion 'Tilaka' of his shining forehead, likened by many with the 'Sharika Shila' at Hari Parbat.

He was a recluse who lived an austere life. He was an ascetic and an introvert who was never after name or fame. He had taken birth not only to achieve the supreme truth himself but also to uplift others spiritually, rescue those in difficulty and relieve the suffering of their pain. He proved to be a pole star guiding the course of the

ship of life for a number of devotees. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has rightly observed about such an experience, 'It is good to know that the ancient thinkers required of us to realize the possibilities of the soul in solitude and silence, and to transform the flashing and fading moments of vision into a steady light which could illumine the long years of life.' He was always engrossed in his own divine spiritual world, in communion with the Divine, whom he could approach at will. He was not in favour of getting married. Perhaps he thought that he would not be able to devote his full attention to the 'sadhana' that was his main interest and the aim of his life. We have had many examples of sages who did not marry for the same reason or if they did under force and coercion of their parents, they had to neglect their family, which pained them. The 14th century saint Nunda Rishi was forced to marry and got two children. Eventually his wife died and he himself went into a cave for intense penance. The burden of bringing up the kids fell on his aged mother. It is said that the old lady approached him and asked him to relieve her of this troublesome responsibility. The sage looked up towards the sky and requested God to take away the children since household duty was not his forte. Instantaneously the children died and that was the end of this distraction for him. To avoid such a grave and pathetic situation it was in the fitness of things that Bhagavaan Ji should have from the beginning decided not to marry and lead the life of a celibate. He had special liking for the celibates although he was equally considerate and kind towards the devotees who were householders. He recognized that even they could attain spiritual heights but the path for them was more arduous.

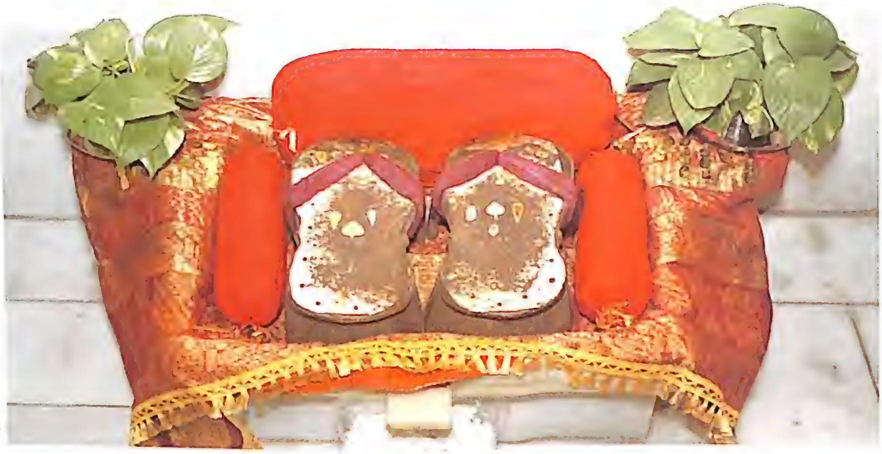
Bhagavaan Ji was a saint, who did not believe in creating a sect or a group around him. He was not given to discourses or philosophical sermons. His aim had been to know the truth, mitigate the suffering of people and give spiritual guidance to those who sought it from him. Because of these peculiarities nobody could see anything unusual in him that would suggest his eventual sainthood. Leading a group of young friends to various shrines or arranging *'Rasa Leela'*, the spiritual dances, remaining celibate or even seeing some prominent saints occasionally could not be sufficient indication of his being a 'Sadhu'. He did no miracles in his childhood and demonstrated no super natural powers. Why

should he have done so? After all he had not to impress anyone or prove his stature or position. He was a quiet, shy lad who was of religious bent of mind no doubt but in the conventional manner only. Every household in Kashmir had a 'pooja' room called *'Thokur Kuth'* earmarked for daily worship. Small 'Shiva Lingam' of crystal, a 'Saligram' of a crimson coloured stone, a coin showing Shri Rama Panchayatan, Ganesha and replicas of other deities would be kept there with devotion. Every morning these idols would be washed, smeared with sandal-paste, decorated with flowers of all hues and then propitiated with devotional hymns, 'Bhakti Stotras'. In these private worshipping sessions as also at different pilgrimage centers popular 'Stotras' like Bhawani Sahasranam, Indrakshi, Panchastavi, Shad-akshar and Pancha-akshar hymns would be sung. People would also sing 'Leelas' and 'Bhajans' in praise of their choicest Deities, either in chorus with the accompaniment of Harmonium, Tabla and earthenware pitcher called *'No't'* or solo, in individual ways, with faith and dedication.

This was the general religious scenario of an average Kashmiri family. Then there was extra religious fervour and atmosphere in his father's house and in the house of his maternal grandfather. No wonder, therefore, that Bhagavaan Ji turned out to be an ascetic of highest spiritual attainment. He was simple in manners, straightforward in demeanour, man of few words, agile and restless in mind but firm and resolute in his aspiration to know the Divine. He never adopted any outward garb of a saint. Neither did he grow a beard nor did he wear any ochre dress like the usual mendicants. His dress was that of an ordinary Kashmiri Pandit, a shirt, a waistcoat, a 'Pheran' with a detachable white lining and a turban tied on the head. During the winters he would put a black blanket over his shoulders and take a 'Kangri' inside his 'Pheran'. There was nothing unusual in all this that would give an impression that he was a sage of highest order. Yet he was a saint, a seer, a sage, and a saviour of the mankind. When he grew up, however, he did smoke a 'Chillum' and had a 'Dhooni' lighted in front of him. At best this gave an impression of his being a *'Mastana'* or one lost in the world of his own and not that of an accomplished emancipated soul that he actually was. Yashodha and Nanda Rai of Gokul never realized that the boy that was playing in their courtyard was God-

incarnate himself. They did not know that this boy whose tantrums pleased them was the Lord of the three worlds. How could one gauge the spiritual plane at which our Master was or the level of spiritual accomplishment that he had reached. Strange are the lives of such yogis and mysterious are their ways.

Jagadguru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji
(1898-1968)



Salutations to the 'Paduka' of our Master.
Paduka, which is splendid and adorable;
Paduka, which fulfills all our desires;
Paduka, the giver of peace;
Paduka, which enables us to be one with Parama Shiva

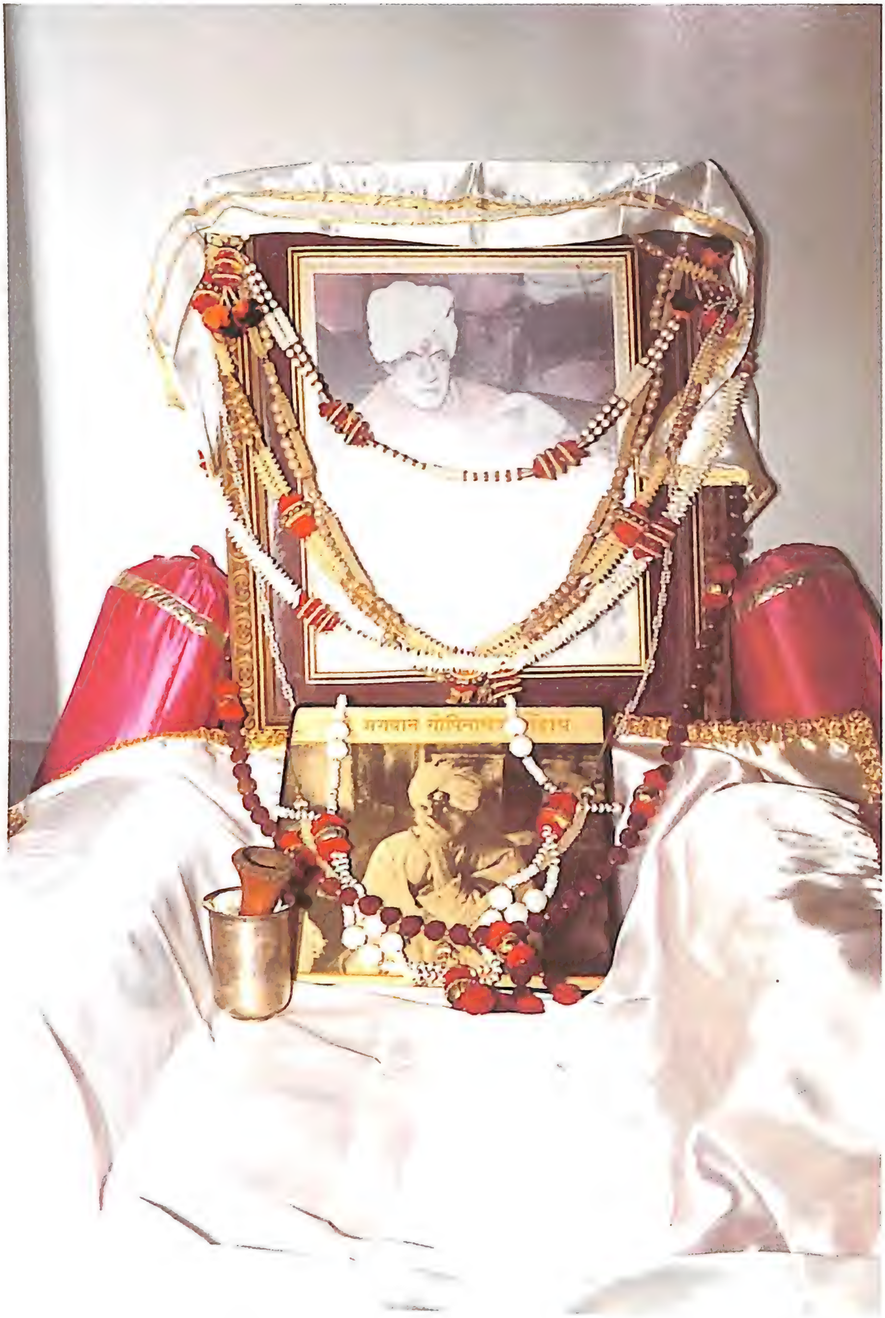
Bhagavaan Ji out doors (with Chillum and make shift Dhooni)

Jagadguru Bhagavaan Gopinathji
(at his Chillum in his usual ecstatic mood)

Devotees assembled to collect the holy ashes of Bhagavaan Ji's gross body at the Cremation ground

Devotees crossing the river at Prayag (KMR) for the immersion of the holy ashes at the confluence of Sindh and Vitasta

Postage stamp and First day cover released by Government of India as a part of Centenary Celebration



Chillum the constant companion

Jagadguru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji
Meaningful eloquence and benign gaze

Jagadguru – The beckonlight

CHAPTER II

Flowering of the Sainthood

Manushyanam sahasreshu kaschid yatati siddhaye,
Yatatam-api siddhanam kaschid mam vetti tattvatah.
(Very few out of the thousands of persons strive to gain sainthood. Very few out of those striving few know Me in essence.)

Bhagavaan Ji was born and brought up in a highly religious environment. He was drawn towards spirituality and piety by what he inherited as also, perhaps, by what he carried forward from his past births as his '*Sanskaras*' or accumulated attributes. He took interest in religious chores and selfless service. He took pleasure in visiting shrines and meeting saints and savants. He lost his mother when he was twelve years of age and father when he was in mid-twenties. Both his sisters were widowed at early ages. His niece, Shrimati Kamala Ji daughter of his elder sister also died young after giving birth to a son and two daughters. All these sufferings must have affected the young mind of Bhagavaan Ji, made him vividly conscious of the impermanence of this world and induced him to seek something permanent, immortal and eternal. No wonder some of his foreign disciples have compared him with the great Buddha. Even the great poet Sumitranandan Pant has put him in the same category as that of Rama, Krishna and Buddha. An English version of a poem written by him by way of a tribute to him is given at the end of this book. He also vividly observed death, disease, decay and suffering that changed his outlook to this world as also the course of his life. When someone asked Buddha whether he was God or a Prophet, he is said to have replied that he was awake. Bhagavaan Ji too was awake yet an introvert, pensive and very less communicative throughout.

In 1923 on Vijay Saptami he joined a group of people comprising the families of Shalis and Parimoos for pilgrimage to Mattan. When they reached Khanabal by boat, he along with a couple of his associates separated from the group and dashed off to see the saint Jeevan Sahib, who lived somewhere that side. There are other instances when he similarly went to see other saints. He

would likewise organize trips to Kshir Bhawani, Mahadev, Vitsarnag and other holy places along with a group of people as their leader. This shows that Shrines and Saints attracted him a lot. Shrines would provide him the right atmosphere and a serene environment for his spiritual 'sadhana'. Saints would provide him the proper forum to talk about his spiritual experiences and also help him choose the right mode of 'sadhana' best suited to his genius and temperament. He must have carried forward the '*sanskaras*' of his previous births because of which the latent sainthood in him started flourishing right from his young age. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita says, '*Aneka janma sansiddhah tato yanti paran-gatim* – a seeker gets perfected over a number of births and then only attains the exalted spiritual position'. The exalted spiritual position that Bhagavaan Ji attained during his lifetime stands testimony to the fact that he had a number of highly successful spiritual lives in the past, the cumulative effect of which enabled him to merge with the Divine during this life.

Although the formal school education did not satisfy his mental needs, he did continue his studies till he completed the Middle Standard. He was a student of the Church Missionary School, Fateh Kadal, just across the river from his house. A renowned missionary educationist, Tyndel Biscoe had established this school as a part of his missionary work. The two of Bhagavaan Ji's close classmates were Pt. Vish Nath Kukiloo and Pt. Gash Lal Bhan. The trio would jump into the river Vitasta from the diving board of the school and swim down the river right up to the Veer after the seventh bridge 'Safa Kadal' and then swim back to the third bridge, Fateh Kadal. It is authentically known that he had a good command over Persian, Sanskrit and Urdu. He knew both Devanagari and Sharada scripts. Whether he had read these languages or acquired their knowledge by the dint of his spiritual acumen is, however, not known. There are many devotees of his who have vouched that in his ecstatic mood he would sometimes utter beautiful sentences in English as well. It is also said that when the Kashmir question was being discussed and debated in the Security Council he had uttered a few sentences in an unintelligible language, which turned out to be Russian eventually as these very sentences were spoken by the Russian Delegate the next day while vetoing the resolution of the Council sponsored by the Western

powers, which was detrimental to the interests of India. There is a legend that at the behest and with the grace of Roop Bhawani her nephew could read and write in Persian, though formally he was unlettered having had no schooling as such. In his early life Bhagavaan Ji would recite Bhawani Sahsranama, Indrakshi, Panchastavi, Vishnu Sahasranama, Mahimnastotra and Shivastotravali. He would occasionally recite the Vaakhs of Kashmiri Saints as well. He was an ardent reader of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, a copy of which was always by his side.

In his later years he would recite a shloka or two from these scriptures but would not read from them; perhaps he had memorized them thoroughly. He seems to have been particularly fond of the fourth 'Stava' called the '*Ambastava*' or the Hymn to Mother. He would himself recite a verse or two from it. Once when Shri S.N.Bakshi was introduced to him as a melodious singer of the 'Panchastavi' he asked him to recite the same fourth hymn in a singing tone. Another important text that was very dear to his heart was the 'Guru Gita', a hymn in praise of the preceptor. This clearly demonstrated the amount of importance he gave to a preceptor for those who aspire for the Supreme Truth. His attendance at the Satsang of saints and scholars shows that he took keen interest in Vedanta and Kashmir Shaiva Darshan in particular and in other disciplines discussed at these meetings in general. For him the different paths of devotion and self-realization did not matter. It was the goal of merger with the Divine, which was of utmost importance for a seeker. The Scriptures were, therefore, of secondary importance to him and what mattered was the personal spiritual experience. Some Sadhu is reported to have made a comment about his not being well versed in scriptures to a disciple of his. Endowed with a clear vision as he was, he made a mention of this comment when the disciple visited him. By this he proved that knowledge does not come to a seeker by merely reading and memorising like a parrot but by perception, vision and yoga and that the experienced truth is supreme and is superior to that acquired by reading scriptures or by listening to discourses. He believed in this shloka from 'Panchadashi': '*Adhitya chaturo vedan sarva-shastranya-anekshah, Brahma tattvam na janati darvi sooparasam yatha* – Just as the feeding spoon does not get the taste of the soup served with it, a person does not get to know the Divine merely by

reading the four Vedas and all the scriptures many times over'. The idea conveyed here is that the scriptures are there to help. They are the means but it is the perceived and experienced truth ultimately that matters.

Bhagavaan Ji was a *'Virakta'*, a recluse and, therefore, paid scant regard to bread-winning chores. Even when his elder sister brought to his notice the dire straits of financial needs that the family was in, he would side track the issue and advise her to leave the matter to God. He was aware of the Lord having said in the Gita, *'Tesham nityabhiyuktanam yogakshemam vahamya'ham.* I take care of providing what is not available and safeguarding that which is already available for those who are constantly linked with Me.' In the name of bread winning he is reported to have initially joined his maternal uncle in Pashmina wool trade, which incidentally was his father's profession also. Thereafter he joined a local press as a compositor. It is said that his joining made the establishment flourish in its printing business. He considered it his give and take obligation called *'Dasdarad'* or *'Darahorai'* in Kashmiri, carried over from his previous birth, which he relieved himself of by working there for three years. Thereafter he left the job in spite of the proprietor's insistence to continue. Thereafter another press made an offer, which also he spurned. The next worldly engagement he had was to start a grocer's shop. It was on this shop that he busied himself more and more in spiritual 'sadhana' than in selling the various items of grocery kept in the shop. During these days people have observed him lost in his own contemplation and meditation. Sometimes he would spend even nights at the shop absorbed in his own yogic experiences. *Sanyasa* has been defined in the Gita as giving up desire-oriented deeds, *'Kamyanam karmanam nyasam'*. *Tyaga* has been defined as abandonment of all the fruits of actions, *'Sarva-karma-phala tyagam'*. Both these definitions aptly apply to our saint and, therefore, we can safely say that he was a *Sanyasi* and a *Tyagi* in the true sense of the terms. He had no desires and no need to perform any desire-oriented actions. He was detached and had no craving for any fruit of his actions.

It seems he was deeply seeped into the dictates of Patanjali's Yoga Vasishtha. He would strictly adhere to *'Yama'* and *'Niyama'*, do's and do not's prescribed therein. He adopted the laid down

posture *'asana'* and engaged in *'Dharna'* and *'Dhyana'* or contemplation, concentration and meditation. His aim was *'Samadhi'* or complete merger with the Divine and this art he was perfecting slowly and steadily, largely unnoticed by others. With his constant companion 'Chillum' and occasionally *'Khos'*, the Kashmiri teacup in his hand also he would be miles away absorbed in his own ideas wandering in his own world. The sparks from the fire in the 'Chillum' would burn his dress even his lips sometimes, the tea in the cup would become ice-cold and he would be unmindful of all this, himself dwelling in his spirit and not the gross body. An eminent Urdu poet has said, *'Rehte hain apne jism main kuchh istarah se ham, Apne nahin kisi gair ke ghar mein hun jaise'* meaning that I live in my own body in such a detached way as if I live in somebody else's house and not in my own. This was exactly what Bhagavaan Ji must have lived like. His real self was his soul and the spirit that was embodied in the gross body and only carried by it.

When he lost his father in the house of Pt. Dina Nath Bota at Rangateng, it seems his last link with the mundane world was severed. He plunged headlong into the rigorous discipline of *'Yoga Sadhana'*. His communication with outside world was minimal and he remained in communion with his inner self all the time. May be he also believed in what Lal Ded had said six hundred years ago: *'Go'ran dopnam kunuy vatsun, nyabra dopnam andar atsun.* – My preceptor told me but one secret, to go from without to within to seek Him'. There are eyewitness accounts that while at the shop he would seldom speak to others and would remain lost in his own inner world. Many a time he would leave the shutters of the shop unbolted and unlocked and rush to Hari Parbat. This shows the aversion he had towards the worldly affairs although the circumstances compelled him to attend to family matters occasionally. That sure must have been a detached involvement, an outward act.

While there are authentic accounts of his knowledge of various *'Stotras'* and devotional texts, it is not known if he had studied various scriptures and texts relating to Vedanta, Kashmir Shaiva Darshan or the like. Even otherwise 'Bhawani Sahasranam' and 'Panchastavi' are the two texts very popular among the

Kashmiri Pandits, the all-Brahmin community. There are two possibilities in this regard. Either he had studied some of these texts or he had experienced through his own 'Yoga sadhana' all that is written and explained in these scriptures. Such things are not uncommon with many a saint of high spiritual order. In Kashmiri language it is called *'Apaer achhar'* or acquiring knowledge without reading any text. It is stated that the great 18th century saint Roop Bhawani imparted knowledge to her nephew in this way. Shri Amritvagbhavachari, a saint of repute from Varanasi is also said to have known the tenets of Kashmir Shaiva Darshan without having studied its texts. It is said that the sage Durvasas had imparted this knowledge to him. Even Kabir has said, *'Tum Kahte ho kagad lekhi, main kahta hun aankhan dekhi* – You narrate what you have studied in the books and I narrate what I have seen with my eyes'. Bhagavaan Ji may not have been seen reading the Gita during his later life but the fact that he would keep a copy by his side amply proves the importance he attached to the knowledge contained in it. Even so it has been reported that he had recited the following three selected Shlokas to Pt. Shankar Pandit and Pt. Nila Kanth of Ali Kadal: 1. *Na jayate mriyate va kadachit. Naayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah. Ajo nityah shashvato-ayam purano na hanyate hanyamane sharire* – The soul has no birth and death. It neither comes into being nor ceases to exist. It is unborn, eternal, constant and ancient, it does not get killed when the body is slain. 2. *Indriyani paranyahuh indriyebhyah param manah. Manasastu para buddhih yo buddheh paratestu sah* – The senses are said to be superior to the body; the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind and beyond intellect is that or the Brahman. 3. *Na tad bhasayate Suryo na shashanko na pavakah. Yadgatva na nivartante taddhama paramam mama* – The eternal abode of Mine is such that it needs no Sun, Moon or fire to illumine it and having attained it there is no return from there. On one occasion he is said to have recited four of the five 'Stavas' or cantos of 'Panchastavi'.

The year 1929 seems to be a landmark in his life. Till then he must have been in search of the spiritual discipline best suited to his temperament. As soon as he moved to the house of Pt. Tika Lal at Rangateng he intensified his *'Sadhana'* on the path finally chosen by him. There was no looking back for him thereafter. In his typical *'Asana'*, with a bolster on the right and at the back, was seated his

'Sthoola Sharira' gross body only. His *'Sookshma Sharira'*, the subtle body was engrossed with his *'Ishta Deva'*, the Brahman. His was an embodiment of a single-minded devotion described in the Gita as *'Eka bhakti vishishyate* – excelling with single minded devotion'. He stayed at this house for seven years. Thereafter he shifted first to the house of Pt. Nila Koul Saraf at Dalhasanyaar and then to the house of Pt. Madhav Joo Sathoo at Rishi Mohalla and stayed in these houses for a period of ten years each. It was in the house of Shri Saraf that for the first time he began to be addressed, remembered and called as Bhagavaan Ji. Finally he moved into the house of Pt. Sham Lal Malla at Chondapora, which turned out to be his last resting place. Here he stayed for eleven years till his 'Maha Nirvana' in 1968. All these places were sanctified and made holy by his presence and by the dust of his lotus feet. Hundreds of people had the good fortune of having his darshan at these places, many blessed people had the good luck of listening to his golden words though limited and very brief, many were cured of their ailments and many more got answers to their queries and remedies to their needs. These answers, however, were always indirect and one had to be very alert and sharp to catch, understand and interpret these.

Kashmir is unique in the matter of the type of saints that this sacred land has produced. No doubt many saints do not perform miracles lest their spiritual achievements get affected or lest they get undue publicity. Some of them are happy with their own 'Sadhana', which they keep strictly private to themselves. Some are there to uplift the society and, therefore, they preach righteousness, morality, piety and good conduct. The saints of Kashmir have done all this and in addition, occasionally they have come to the rescue of those in pain and suffering. The miracles that they have exhibited were not intended to establish their own superiority or gain publicity. These were either to alleviate the suffering of persons in difficulty or to reinforce their faith in 'Dharma'. There used to be a saint by the name of Shakar Shah during Pathan rule in Kashmir. Those days Kashmiri Pandits, who refused to get converted to Islam, would be put in sacs, stones would be tied to these sacs and then they would be drowned in the Dal lake. The place is to date known as *'Bata mazar'* or the burial

ground of Pandits. In this process a Brahmin was put in a sac and forcibly taken to a boat with the purpose of drowning him in the Dal Lake. His wife approached Shakar Shah for help. He wrote an order on a broken earthenware piece, *'Gar cha hukme qaza ast, ba hukme Shakar Shah Mastana nav garaq shaved, huma Brahman bar ayad* – even if the order is for death sentence let the boat capsize and the Brahmin come over to the bank of the river by the order of Shakar Shah'. He asked the lady to drop the earthenware piece in the river over a nearby bridge and wait. She followed the instructions and as soon as the boat touched the spot where this earthenware piece containing his order had fallen, the boat overturned, the passengers got drowned and the Brahmin alone was thrown towards the shore. She hurriedly untied him from the sac and the two returned home happily. Bhagavaan Ji also carried forward this tradition. His miracles were to help people in need, to relieve them of their pain and to give them a glimpse of the powers of spiritualism so that they do not waver from the path of righteousness.

His subtle self was the most valuable possession with him. He kept nothing for himself. Whatever people brought and offered to him was there and then distributed among all those present. Favoured were those who got a pinch of ash from his '*Dhooni*' and '*Dhoop*' or those who were allowed to have a puff at his 'Chillum'. Fortunate were those who were treated to a cup of tea or even to a meal at his place. Theirs is an enviable lot as they got the most precious things one could aspire from this seat of '*Dharma*', truth and righteousness. His '*Aasana*' was a Sanctum Sanctorum, '*Garbha Griha*' and his lotus feet were as sacred as the Flagstaff, '*Dvaja-stambha*' of a temple. The sacred fire in his Dhooni was the 'Agni' about which the Rig Veda says, '*Agnimile purohitam, ratna dhatamam* – I bow to the fire, which has always in the past kept my interests supreme and which is the giver of wealth'. Agni is next only to Indra in the Vedas. It is significant to note that in Rig Veda alone there are more than 200 'Richas' in favour of Agni. While the white turban above his broad forehead bearing a glistening '*tilaka*', a coloured '*pheran*' and a blanket over his shoulders were prominent in his external appearance, a 'Chillum' in his hands, a 'Dhooni' with a blazing flame, a pincer, a long iron tong, a spoon for oblations in front of him and a few pillows and bolsters on the right and at

the back of his 'asana' constituted all the wherewithal he had in his room wherever he stayed. He believed in no sermons, no scriptural discourses and no scholastic discussions. Physically he would be seated in his '*Aasana*' and his real self would be miles away, in communion with his '*Aradhya*', the beloved one. Occasionally the word '*Narayana*' would, as it were, slip out from his lips in a feeble low whispering sound. At times he would mutter a few words in such a low tone as if he were talking to himself or to Him who was all the time within him as the great Lal Ded would have it, '*Vuchhum Pandit panani gare* – I perceived Him within myself'. Normally, however, his eyes would be looking up with his gaze fixed upwards. He was seldom in direct conversation with any one present before him, lost in the world of his own. At times while puffing at his 'Chillum' he would go in a trance, stay in that position for quite sometime and then return to this world. This situation is called in spiritual parlance '*Sahaja Samadhi*', or easy communion with the Divine. This is the high point of 'Yoga'.

Bhagavaan Ji was as pure as the morning dew, as cool as the shade of a Chinar tree and as firm in his resolve as a rock of any mountain surrounding the valley. He was a yogi of the highest order who was engaged in self-purification all the time. The Gita has described the situation in which he would be seen by all those present, in these words: '*Tatraikagram manah kritva yatachittendriyakriyah, upavishyasana yunjyata yogam-atma-vishuddhaye* – Sitting on his seat, making the mind one-pointed and restraining the thinking faculty and the senses, he should practise yoga for self-purification'. This verse aptly describes this holy saint and the posture in which he would be seen sitting for days and months together. No wonder, therefore, when an outsider saint wanted to know Bhagavaan Ji's spiritual stature from a devotee of his, he himself answered by reciting the following Shloka from the Gita: '*Na tad bhasayate Suryah na shashanko na pavakah, yadgatva na nivartante tad-dhama paramam mama* – Which is illumined neither by the Sun nor by the Moon, nor even by the fire, on reaching which there is no returning back, that is the supreme abode of mine'.

This supreme abode is the abode of the Absolute Brahman, who transcends time and space, the three worlds of *Bhu, Bhavah and Svah*, the three attributes of '*Sattva, Rajas, Tamas*' or light, passion

and darkness and the four states of *'Jagrat, swapna, sushupti and turiya'* or waking, dreaming, sleeping and the fourth different from all the three. That Bhagavaan Ji was one with this Brahman embodiment of *'Sat, Chit, Ananda'* or Being, Consciousness and Bliss, endowed with five faculties of *'Srishti, Sthiti, Samhara, Pidana and Anugraha'* or creation, sustenance, merger, enfolding and unfolding, which he carries out through *'Mahashakti'*, His energy aspect, is clear from the statement of this great saint made in reply to this innocuous query. 'Yajnavalkya Smriti' says, *'Ayam tu paramo dharmo yad yogena-atma darshanam* – The highest form of dharma is to realize self through yoga'. Bhagavaan Ji accomplished just that. Through yoga-sadhana he had achieved self-realization and had known the real essence of the self, which is that it is inseparable from the Divine and thus merged with the Supreme Universal Self.

Such was the spiritual attainment of our Master that once his worthy disciple, Shri S.N. Fotedar, while seated in front of him, thought of the colour of the halo that would suit his august personality. Almost instantaneously he saw a halo of bluish colour encircling him, which was there for some time and then vanished. He was an *'Antaryami'*, who could read what was in the minds of the people and immediately react to that thought in his own unique way. I am reminded of an occurrence narrated to me by my late brother. Once he went to see Swami Laxman Joo in his 'Aashram' at 'Ishabaer'. While approaching the lawns he realized that he was having cough. He was apprehensive that if he coughed there it would be very embarrassing in the presence of so many devotees. In any case when he bowed before the saint, he asked him to sit near him. There he gave him some fresh cream with a little sugar sprinkled over it and asked him to put it in his mouth saying that there would be no coughing by taking this sweet cream. Strange are the ways of these sages, whose vision transcends time and space.

CHAPTER III

Towards Self-Realization

Tarati Shokam-Atmavit

(It is the self-realized who crosses the ocean of grief)

Bhagavaan Ji's life is an open book in many respects but a closed one in many others. No body knows who his Guru or preceptor was and nobody has ever been able to fathom the spiritual path he adopted for gaining access to the ultimate Truth. May be his disciples, whom he initiated during his life time, know at least the answer to the latter question, for they must have been guided by him on that path itself. There is an old saying that a person cannot show you the path to a place unless he has himself walked on that. They are, however, silent about this perhaps because there is a tradition in our system when the disciple after having been initiated, says to his preceptor, '*Shrutam me gopaya* – I have heard the directions given by you but I promise to keep them a secret'. We have, therefore, necessarily to take recourse to any indirect evidence that may be available and deduce answers to these two points.

Bhagavaan Ji was very fond of visiting saints and sages. He has been heard quoting the *Vaakhs* or sayings of various saint-poets of Kashmir of olden days. While at Sekidafaer he would press the feet of a 'Jatadhari' saint Swami Balak Kaw, known also as Bal Ji. In 1923 while on a pilgrimage to Mattan he visited the saint Jeewan Sahib living in that area. He was a regular visitor to Zana Kak Tufchi's place, even after his death. He would be present there every Saturday night for the nightlong Bhajan sessions and singing of Guru Gita. Like Zana Kak he also smoked 'Chillum' and offered oblations to a 'Dhooni' kept ablaze in front of him. Many people, therefore, conclude that Zana Kak was his preceptor as also that of Aftab Joo Wangnoo. It is, however, possible that all this he did out of his reverence towards Zana Kak, whom he considered to be a saint of very high spiritual stature. There is other collateral evidence based on which some people are convinced that Zana Kak only was his preceptor. There is a photograph taken on the occasion of the 'Nirvana' of Swami Zana Kak. In this photograph Bhagavaan Ji is seen standing alongside Aftab Joo Wangnoo. Some people have

quoted Zana Kak Ji as having said to Aftab Joo that Bhagavaan Ji was late in joining but even then he is sure to outshine all others. Likewise some people considered to be knowledgeable are stated to have confirmed this view based on what they had known from reliable sources.

Some people are of the opinion that his long time spiritual associate Bola Nath Handoo was either initiated by him or was a fellow disciple of his initiated by some common Guru. He also visited Swami Narayan Joo Bhan, a well-known saint who lived at Bodager in Srinagar. Even Aftab Joo Wangnoo is believed to be his preceptor by some people, though negligible in number. His own sister thought that his father might have initiated him. Some believe that a Bengali Sadhu who met him in 1924 had initiated him. Himself he was non-committal about his Guru. Once when a disciple of his asked him who his Guru was, pat came the reply, 'any one Shloka from the 700 and odd Shlokas of the Gita can be one's Guru'. Those who visited Bhagavaan Ji quite frequently have categorically stated that there was never any mention of his Guru or of the Nirvana-day of the Guru although the death anniversaries of his parents were mentioned as and when they approached and celebrated with due reverence. Before the death of his parents Bhagavaan Ji had a big moustache and a long tuft of hair on his head. He had to undergo a tonsure after performing rites of his parents at Mattan. Thereafter he neither kept any moustache nor had a long tuft on his head. A person of such a disposition would certainly have shown similar reverence to his preceptor, if he had one. Those who were close to Zana Kak Tufchi have said that Bhagavaan Ji was not among the known disciples of his. One does not see any reason why he should have kept the name of his Guru a secret if he had one and why he would not have celebrated his birthdays and Nirvana days year after year.

Be that as it may, the only conclusion that can be derived from all these factors is that Bhagavaan Ji had no formal initiation from any one. He was a self-initiated saint who experimented himself various spiritual disciplines and carved a path best suited to his genius and temperament. He seems to have collected and tasted the sacred waters of all the prominent spiritual streams and found a decoction, a sip of which paved the way for his liberation and

emancipation. Such things are not uncommon with saints and sages in India. It is said that Anandamayi Ma, a saint of high order (1896-1983) took an unorthodox step and initiated herself, one year before she initiated her husband Bolanath. There have also been saints like Sri Rama Krishna, who had reached a very exalted spiritual position on their own before formally getting initiated by their respective preceptors in due course. May be Bhagavaan Ji also was his own Guru. However, this conclusion can be reached with reservation since he is reported to have often expressed the opinion that two things are essential for a seeker, his own focussed effort and the grace of his preceptor.

He started with traditional *'Panchanga Upasana'* of Ganesha, Surya, Narayana, Shiva and Shakti. Ganesha is the *'Adi Deva'*, the primary deity and has to be propitiated before any other deity. Surya is described as *'Pratyakhsha Deva'* or the visible deity. Narayana represents the Vaishnava stream and Shiva the Shaiva stream. Whereas Shiva is *Prakasha*, the Eternal Light, Shakti is the inseparable energy of the Divine with the help of which He controls and manages the entire creation, animate and inanimate. The five together complete the *'Panchayatan'* or a group of five that is worshipped traditionally by the Kashmiris. Later on Bhagavaan Ji seems to have concentrated on Shakti, the energy aspect of the Divine. This must have been the result of his having a vision of the Divine Mother when he was a young man of around 25 years of age. From the age of 22 years itself he had started daily circumambulation, *'Parikrama'* of Hari Parbat. He would rush to Hari Parbat, worship and meditate at Devi Aangan and smoking his Chillum in an open hut there be absorbed with his *'Ishta'*, the desired one. There should be no doubt about his having been a regular practitioner of Yoga as propounded by Patanjali in his 'Yoga Vasishtha'. One has to look at his life and habits in their totality in order to arrive at the conclusion that he had discreetly adopted its tenets of *'Yama'*, *'Niyama'* and *'Asana'*, gone through the stages of *'Dharna'*, and *'Dhyana'* prescribed therein and eventually attained the highest stage of *'Samadhi'* described in this text. No wonder, therefore, that he would often be seen puffing at his 'Chillum' gazing upwards unmindful of his surroundings. He appears to have experimented with control of senses by observing silence at times and by fasting for days on end. He may have practised

'Pranabhyasa' (a Tantric technique of meditation) as well as is clear from the fact that he is reported to have vomitted large quantities of blood at times, which is not uncommon in this process.

Some persons have recorded that he would also propitiate Saturn. This may have been required to ward off the ill effects of Saturn called *'Sadhasati'* in Astrology', on those who begged of him to relieve them of their suffering. Once he himself fasted for a full month with specific purpose of extending the life span of a person by one year whose family needed him. Perhaps he arranged to appropriate his own share of food for that person as he had exhausted his share and was, therefore, due to die. Patrizia Norelli Bachelet, the Director of Aeon Centre of Cosmology has given a different reason for Bhagavaan Ji paying homage to the Saturn in his daily practice. According to her Saturn rules Capricorn and Capricorn is the planetary ruler of India. Furthermore Saturn has been equated with Chronos, the Time-Spirit. This is considered to be Shiva in his *'Mahakala'* or the 'time supreme' form. She has, therefore concluded that since this planet is central to destiny it is no surprise that Bhagavaan Ji used to pay homage to this planet everyday. She has also observed that such saints, who are perfectly realized souls, perform such acts guided by their own inner command that this must be done. Finally Bhagavaan Ji seems to have settled for *'Aghor-upasana'* of Shiva. This is indicated by the two items, which were his lifetime companions, the 'Chillum' and the 'Dhooni'. This *'Upasana'*, or worship gave him a vision of the past, present and future, powers extra-ordinary to control even death and capacity to transcend time and space and remain engrossed with the Divine at will. May be he sometimes dabbled in *'Kundalini yoga'* as well. This can be deduced from the accounts of many of his disciples who have found him often in an ecstatic state. This ecstatic state is the result of awakening of *Kundalini,* the dormant energy coil, which has been described by Adi Shankara in his *'Soundarya Lahari'* as *'Cidananda Lahari'* and *'Paramananda Lahari'*, or bliss of the Consciousness and the bliss Supreme, respectively. The *'Sadhaka'* or the seeker remains glued to his *'Aasana'* for hours together, enjoying the feeling of an eternal bliss. There is an incident when he forbade one of his disciples from this exercise. This could have been because he did not consider Kundalini Yoga suitable in his case or felt that he would not be able to perfect this

form of yoga. After all as a true teacher he had to prescribe what was best suited to each individual learner.

Bhagavaan Ji appears to have reached a *'Jeevan-mukta'* (emancipated in lifetime itself) state at quite a young age in the prime of his youth. Normally this age leads the young men of ordinary prudence astray and they are attracted towards the worldly pleasures. For him, however, the youth was a different cup of tea. It was the time to reflect on the purpose of the life and explore the right path for attaining the Supreme Truth. He did not consider the gross body as the be all and end all of human existence. He would refer to his legs as mere logs of wood. He was unmindful of his body even when it was swollen, unsteady due to prolonged fasting or weak due to some ailment. Once a rat nibbled a hole in one of his heels that remained so for a long time. This shows that he enjoyed himself in his *'Sookshma Sharira'* (Subtle body) of *'Sat, Chit and Ananda'* or Being, Consciousness and Bliss and bothered little about his *'Sthula Sharira'* (Gross body) of flesh and blood or the *'Karana Deha'* (Causal body). He had no qualms in taking non-vegetarian food and sometimes showed extreme habits by either not eating at all for a long period or by eating unusually large quantities of food. Taking opium, Datura seeds, *'panak'* and other intoxicants, emptying bottleful of whisky or brandy when offered at times were the other extremes he engaged in and baffled those present on these occasions. Strange are the ways of such saints and nobody can fathom their depth, vastness or gravity.

It is very difficult to classify his method of *'Sadhana'*. He has guided many a disciple transmitting knowledge either through his 'Chillum' or by a mere gaze or by touching them with a pair of tong used for the fire in his 'Dhooni'. There are indications that he prescribed different methods of *'Sadhana'* to different disciples of his. This shows that he would examine the capacity, genius and aptitude of a devotee before suggesting what particular path he should follow to achieve the Supreme Truth. His frequent visits to holy places and shrines and his having shown some people a vision of the Divine Mother in the form of a girl indicates his *'Sakaara Upasana'* or worship of the Divine with form. Hymns to various deities written in his own hand show his inclination towards *'Bhakti'* or devotion. This is also indicated by the fact that the portraits of

gods and goddesses, and great saints like Guru Nanak and Sri Rama Krishna Paramhamsa adorned the walls of his room. This is further corroborated by the fact that he was very fond of classical music. Shri Shivpuri, who would normally go along with his disciples carrying a Harmonium and a pair of Tabla to sing before him, was once asked by him to bring a Tanpura along giving a clear indication that he preferred Classical music to other forms of light music. He would present various ragas like Kedar, Malkauns, Jogia, and Bairagi Bhairav etc. Many well-known Musicians like Shri Shivpuri, Mohd. Abdullah Tibetbaqal and Ved Lal Vakil would present Kashmiri Sufiana Kalam and Bhajans before him. This indicates the state of proximity or '*Samipya*' in his spiritual life, which is an essential ingredient of the '*Bhakti Marga*' of the dualistic school of Philosophy propounded by Madhvacharya. He would concentrate on 'Om' and has written this seed syllable, symbolizing the crux of the Vedas in his own hand in Sharada script. Shri Gita says, '*Pranavah sarva Vedeshu* – I am the Om, the crux of all the Vedas'. He has also written Rama and Shiva decoratively around this Pranava. This shows his firm belief in the fact that Shiva and Vishnu are one and the same. He was so much enamoured about the worship of 'Om' that he once explained that it was the throat of the godhead. Om is described in Maitri Upanishad in these words: 'the sound of Brahman is Om. At the end of Om is silence. It is a silence of joy. It is the end of journey where fear and sorrow are no more, steady, motionless, never falling, ever lasting, immortal. In order to reach the Highest consider in adoration the sound and silence of Brahman. For it has been said, God is sound and silence. His name is Om. Attain, therefore, contemplation – contemplation in silence on Him'. Bhagavaan ji advocated this contemplation on Om. This is also indicative of his '*Nirguna Nirakara upasana*' or worship of the attribute-less and formless God and the state of similarity or '*Sarupya*' in his spiritual life, peculiar to the *Vishishta-advaita* or qualified monism of Ramanujacharya. One has, therefore, to conclude that for him all paths led to the same goal or that he believed that different methods of '*Sadhana*' were useful at different levels of spiritual quest and for seekers with different capacities and attitudes.

Ultimately he became a '*Siddha*', an accomplished soul conquering death, transcending time and space and remaining in

constant communion with the Divine and thus attaining the state of identity or *'Sayujya'* as a spiritual entity, the ultimate goal envisaged in the *Advaita* or non-dualistic doctrine upheld and elaborated by Adi Shankara. It is astonishing that while analyzing and writing commentaries on the *'Brahma-sutra'* of Badarayan, the Upanishads and the Gita, called the *'Prasthana Trayee'* the three great commentators, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja and Madhva should have propounded three different schools of Philosophy. This justifies Bhagavaan Ji's saying that one can hold on to any branch of the tree and yet reach the Truth. A saint is once reported to have found it rather baffling that he should have come to the shrine at Tulamula and without performing any puja at the holy spring should have straightaway gone to a hut in the periphery and got absorbed with his own 'Chillum'. Here one is reminded of a couplet written by an Urdu poet, *'Jo khud se guzar jate hain sijda nahin karte* – one who has transcended the self seldom bows'. No doubt he had reached that elevated stage in spirituality where he had transcended his self and had become one with the Divine. There was thus no need for him to follow the routine rituals or routine practices.

He was a *'Virakhta'*, a detached *'Sadhaka'* although occasionally he attended to his family matters as well as social customs. Shri Shali has stated that he once attended the tenth day ceremony of someone who had died but was seen absorbed with the Sun above. He was compassion personified and that is why he sometimes deferred the death of a person when the situation so demanded and so often relieved people of their pain and suffering. God only knows how many people have benefitted due to his benign and compassionate nature and how many have got solace sitting at his lotus feet. Even a cat was allowed to sit in his 'Asana' in spite of the remonstrations of some devotees. It is, therefore, meaningless to enter into a discussion as to which Guru initiated him and what method of worship he professed. Let us not forget what Pushpadanta has said in his *'Shiva-mahimnastotra'*, which Bhagvaan ji often recited in his younger days, *'Trayi sankhyam yogah pashupatimatam vaishnavam-iti, prabhinne prasthane param-idam adah pathyam-iti cha, ruchinam vaichitryat riju kutila nana patha jushyam, nrinam eko gamyah tvam-asi payasam arnava-iva-* At different times different people professing Vedas, Sankhya, Yoga, Shaivism or

Vaishnavism due to their personal preferences proclaim their faith as beneficial. Yet all these people treading different paths, whether straight or involved, seek you alone O Lord! Just as all the rivers are heading towards the ocean only.'

From different accounts of the devotees it is clear that Bhagavaan Ji attached a lot of importance to the grace of a preceptor. By this he meant that a preceptor was always a must in order to evaluate the need, the capacity and the temperament of a seeker. Although he has emphasized that the effort of the seeker is of paramount importance and that he has himself to strive for the truth, yet he feels that the preceptor helps him in selecting the method best suited to his genius, guides him in spiritual exercise and assists him in warding off the difficulties and overcoming the hurdles. Just as destiny and actions govern the course of one's worldly affairs the two important elements that shape the spiritual '*Sadhana*' of a seeker are '*Guru Kripa*' or the grace of the preceptor and '*Parishrama*' or the effort of the seeker himself.

It is clear from the account given in the preceding paragraphs that he experimented with all sorts of spiritual disciplines, different methods of worshipping and various procedures of penance and thus climbed the ladder as it were, step by step. This position also suggests that he had no formal initiation from anyone. For had he got initiation from a Guru he would have been directed on a specific spiritual path and he would have no need for all the experimentation that he actually had to undertake. In that case he would have adopted the path prescribed by his preceptor and stuck to it up to the last. He would give a lot of importance to the path of '*Vichara*' or contemplation, the path leading to supreme awareness and universal consciousness. He used to talk reverentially about persons whom he thought were '*Vicharavan*' or thoughtful. This *vichara* took him to the level of totality, universality and limitless eternity. He appeared before Mr. Simpfendorfor, an Australian devotee in 1978 and remarked: 'World harmony depends on a globally inter-connected network of light among sacred places and groups of people without regard to nationality or religion'. This is a glaring demonstration of Bhagavaan Ji having attained a universal vision and having dismantled all man-made barriers of religion, cast, creed sects and faiths. This is perhaps the elevated position

where saints like him quite naturally make statements like, '*Aham Brahmo'smi* – I am the Brahman, the Divine' or '*Man Khuda* – I am God Almighty' or '*Anal Haq* – I am the Truth' or '*Chidananda Rupo Shivo'ham Shivo'ham* – I am Shiva, I am Shiva, in the form of Consciousness and Bliss, or in the words of the Upanishad *Tat Twam asi* – That Thou art or the Sufi's *Hama-O-ast* - I am He'.

Shri Rama Krishna is reported to have experimented with Muslim and Christian methods of attaining the Truth with the same amount of success as he had achieved by following the traditional Indian methods of 'Advaita'. Even the great Lal Ded, the 14th Century saint-poetess of Kashmir has said, '*Shiv Chhui thali thali rozan, mo zan Hyond ta Musalman* – God pervades everything, do not, therefore, discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim'. Bhagavaan Ji also has remarked once, '*Hyond chha akh ta Musalman byakh* – is there any difference between a Hindu and a Muslim?' In fact there is an interesting story involving a Muslim. It is said that a lady came to see him. A Muslim servant accompanied her carrying a bagful of yellow pears called 'Bagugosha'. He directed that these be distributed among all present beginning with the servant. A devotee who was distributing the fruit gave one pear to him but Bhagavaan ji signalled that he be given more. One after the other he got five pears whereas others got only one pear each. Later he revealed that when the lady was purchasing the fruit he had a craving to get some for his consumption but he was not sure that he would get even one as he did not know the person for whom these were being purchased. It is the saints of his stature who have a universal outlook, a world view and an unlimited vision who are able to perceive the truth and express it spontaneously in these expressions: '*Ishavasyam-idam-sarvam yat kinchit jagatyam jagat* – All this that is and that takes place here in this world is pervaded by the Divine' or '*Vasudevah sarvam-iti* – Everything here verily is Shri Krishna only' as clearly stated in the Ishavasya Upanishad and the Gita, respectively.

CHAPTER IV

Traits and Features of the Saint

Daivee sampad-vimokshaye
(Divine traits lead to liberation)

Shrimad Bhagavad Gita says, '*Aneka janma sansiddhah tato yanti paran gatim* – A *Sadhaka* or a seeker gains perfection in successive births and then attains the highest exalted position'. No doubt Bhagavaan Ji had an accumulated treasure of 'Sadhana' over many past births, which was apparent from his habits and attitudes in this birth. He was wary of '*Kamini*' and '*Kanchan*', woman and wealth. All the efforts of his family members to get him married failed and he remained a 'Brahmachari', a celibate throughout his life. Being a lover of 'Brahman', he sought Him through holy sacrifice (*Yajna*), charity (*Daana*), penance (*Sadhanaa*) and abstinence (*Brahmacharya*). Sages like him never desire offspring. After all they possess the spirit, which is the whole world. Having the whole they do not hanker after a part. Bhagavaan Ji was spiritually also a '*Brahmachari*' in real terms, which means 'one who is all the time engrossed in Brahman, the Divine- *Brahmane vicharati-iti*'. Although he believed that a '*Grihasta*', household man could also attain spiritual heights yet he was happier to guide a celibate in his spiritual quest. He was very particular about good moral character of men and chastity of women. The following anecdotes will illustrate this fact:

1. At a very young age some of his class-fellows took him to a prostitute's house. After each one of them had satisfied his lust, Bhagavaan ji was sent into her room. He found her in a shameful state, rebuked her and admonished her for her evil deeds. He threw a Rupee coin at her advising her to give up this sinful activity and lead a chaste life.

2. Bhagavaan Ji was in his fifties when he lived at Rishi Mohalla in the house of his elder sister's son-in-law, Pt. Madhav Joo Sathoo. During this period once a lady came to see him. No sooner was she seated than he started

beating her with his iron pincer. She took to her heals and he chased her away first into the courtyard and then on to the lane outside. He was visibly shaken with rage and anger. When he returned to his seat he told the persons present that the lady was unchaste and had visited two bad guys that morning. He was annoyed that such a sinful lady should have mustered the courage to come near him.

3. Once a group of five women from outside Kashmir came to see him. He was unhappy and remarked that in this age of 'Kali' these ladies lived by unchaste acts.

4. Once he admonished a man who had come to see him because he was involved with a widow and was planning to have physical relationship with her. Bhagavaan Ji warned him that his evil action would ignite fire all round. The man took his advice and refrained from the sinful act.

5. There was another person who was enamoured about the shapely legs of a damsel. When he went to see Bhagavaan Ji he could read his evil thoughts and explained to him the futility of going after the external beauty of this body, which is nothing but food for 'Yama', the god of death. Thereby he laid stress on the intrinsic beauty of the soul, which is immortal and decay-less.

6. A gentleman has confessed that when he was studying in a college and had got a new fashionable dress for himself, he had thought that all the young girls studying with him would fall for him because of his elegance. His friends had cut jokes with him when he came wearing the new dress. He visited Bhagavaan Ji who immediately read his mind. He remarked that the human body was full of filth and one need not give it any undue importance. He even reproduced the remarks that had been made to him by his friends. This was his way of emphasizing the futility of worldly pleasures.

Himself also he did not attach too much importance to his external self, the body or its upkeep and maintenance. Every

morning he would wash his face and Yajnopavit with water at a water tap. Then he would be seated on his *'asana'*. Here he would tie his turban and put on a tilak of saffron with a little ash in the centre. Thereafter he would light his 'Dhooni' in an iron sigdi placed on a stone slab or in a large iron tray. The 'Dhooni' would be kept burning with firewood from morning till evening. In the morning some oblations would be offered in the 'Dhooni' and then he would fill his 'chillum' and engage in smoking. Oblations into the fire would consist of *'Shakkar'* (raw sugar, yellowish-brown in colour), rice, barley, dry fruits, mint and skimmia leaves, *'bel patra'* and flowers of sorts. This *'yajna'* was a detached *'sattvika yajna'* described as the yajna of the highest order in the Bhagavad Gita in the following verse: *'Aphalakankshibhir-yajnah vidhi drishto ya ijyate, yashtavyam-eva-iti manah samadhaya cha Sattvikah* – Yajna performed without desiring any fruit, as per procedure, with mind fixed on yajna only for its own sake is categorized as a *sattvika yajna'*. He was particular that the 'Dhooni' was always in flame and it was not merely a burning charcoal. This indicated the importance he imparted to the light 'Prakasha' represented by the flame and blaze. This is in consonance with the Vedic prayer, *'Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya* – lead me from darkness to light'

Up to 1925 he used to wear costly Pashmina *'Pheran'* and sophisticated shoes. Once he lost his father a turning point came in his life and he became indifferent to what he wore. He would change his dress only after his sister or his devotees pressed for the same, and that too after a week or fortnight. His dress was a simple *'pheran'* with *'potsh'*(a detachable lining made of white cotton cloth), a shirt and a waistcoat. During summer the *'pheran'* would be made of coloured linen. During winter he would wear a woolen *'pheran'* with a blanket over it. He would also keep a *'kangri'*, a firepot inside to warm him. He became indifferent to his personal hygiene, food and other things also once he plunged into his intense *'Sadhana'*. It is said that during the last thirty years of his life he bathed hardly twice, once at Tulamula in the Sindhu canal while on pilgrimage to Kshir Bhawani shrine and again during a severe winter when even the waters of the Dal lake had frozen. The second one was at the request of his devotees to relieve them of the severe winter. The effect of his taking a bath on that occasion was that soon thereafter the cold wave subsided and the people got respite

from the chill. He would have his head shaved once every month and then his devotees would massage his body with oil. These people have reported that during this exercise a strange aroma and fragrance would be smelt from his body. He declined this massage also a few years before leaving his mortal frame. He had scant regard for the gross body, as he was always one with the 'Brahman'. He was a Brahmin of the highest order as per the definition, '*Brahmam janati iti Brahmana* – one who knows the Brahman is a Brahmin'. There is another Shloka, which corroborates this fact. '*Janmana jayate Shudrah, sanskarena Dvijottamah, Vedapathena Viprah, Brahma jnanena Brahmana* – By birth every person is a *Shudra*, by religious rites he becomes a *Dvija*, a twice born, by studying the Vedas he is known as *Vipra* and by knowing the Brahman he is entitled to be called a Brahmin.' By this definition also he was a Brahmin of the highest order.

In the matter of food also he showed a lot of indifference. He used to say that one should not eat when one is hungry but feed this body only when there is no urge for eating or appetite. This was obviously to conquer hunger and thirst. He would go without food for days together and sometimes eat ferociously. Perhaps he believed in what is stated in Shri Gita about digestion, '*Aham Vaishvanaro bhutva praninam deham-ashritah, pranapana-samayukhtah pachami annam chaturvidham* – Abiding in the body of living beings as *Vaishvanara*, associated with *pran* and *apana*, inhale and exhale, I digest the four types of food'. Normally he would take a cup of Kashmiri black tea called '*Mogael chai*' at about 9 a.m. At about 1 p.m. he would have his lunch consisting of rice, vegetables etc. For this he had to be reminded by his sister and many times he would decline saying that either it was too late or too early. In the afternoon he would again take a cup of '*Mogael chai*' or salted tea with milk, called '*Sheer chai*' in Kashmiri. More often he would take only one meal a day and even that he stopped eight months before giving up his gross body. Even while eating or taking tea he would be lost in his own contemplation, in his own '*Sadhana*' and in his own spiritual world. The tea in the Kashmiri bronze cup called '*Khose*' would get ice cold while in his hand for a prolonged time. Then he would either gulp it down or throw it away. During fasting he would be physically weak but mentally alert. '*Chillum*' was his constant companion and as per his own statement it would give

him enough nourishment. It seems he had complete mastery and control over his sense organs because of which he did not feel hunger or need for any thing else.

Whatever was offered to him he would accept, When even liquor, say a bottle of whisky or brandy, was placed before him he would have some quantity distributed among those present and the rest he would empty himself. (Sometime he would ask someone present to empty the bottle outside or even have it thrown in a river.) His body would shake and he would go into a trance for a couple of hours. He had the eternal intoxication of the Divine, which engulfed him day and night. The artificial intoxicants did not matter for him. One is reminded of a verse uttered by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, when the Mughal king Babur offered him a cup of wine. He said, '*Charas, bhang, afiyun sab utar jaat prabhat, nam khumari Nanaka chadi rahe din raat* – the intoxication of marijuana, opium and other drugs is gone by the morning but the intoxication of the Divine Name remains with us day and night'. Bhagavaan Ji had tasted this intoxication of the Divine Name and everything that he consumed was to add to this eternal bliss of intoxication and not for any temporary worldly pleasure. Taking these intoxicants was not a matter of addiction for him but a source of withdrawing from the mundane, worldly transient exterior to an eternal and lasting interior, from exoteric to esoteric. (Ghalib has said in one of his verses, '*Mai se garaz nishat hai kis ru siyah ko, ik goona bekhudi mujhe din raat chahiye*' – curse be on me if I consume liquor for any enjoyment, I drink only to be in a selfless unconscious state for sometime.) He knew that the Lord not only was '*Upadrashta*', the onlooker and '*Anumanta*', the permission-granting authority but he was also '*Bharta*', the master-protector as well as '*Bhokta*', the consumer and the enjoyer.

He was very indifferent to the type or the quality of the food offered to him. He would not mind non-vegetarian food, meat or fish. Yellow rice (rice cooked with turmeric powder) with cooked sheep-liver is a common '*Prashada*' at his '*Aashram*'. It is reported that many persons who are otherwise strict vegetarians also accept such offerings purely as the sacred '*Prashada*'. There is an interesting episode about a devotee who hesitated somewhat to take the non-vegetarian '*Prashada*'. He went into a dream-state while seated in

the *ashrama* and saw two *'Agni-kunds'*, sacred fireplaces. One was full of burning fire all in flames and the other had low-burning fire with half-burnt fuel. Pieces of meat were thrown in both the fireplaces. These burnt fast in the first one without any trace or odour. In the other the half-burnt meat gave out bad smell. When the gentleman woke up he got the message, which was that an emancipated soul was like the burning fire, unaffected by whatever he consumed while an ordinary mortal had to discriminate between what to eat and what not to eat. Even so those in the proximity of Bhagavaan Ji have vouched that he would abstain from consuming eggs, onions, garlic and the like, perhaps more because of the fact that there is a tradition in Kashmiri Pandit families not to consume these things and less for any religious considerations. Dieticians also are of the opinion that people consuming such things are more prone to lust and sensuality than those who do not include these items in their daily diet. This is a sure disturbance in the spiritual exercise.

It has been recorded that on four or five occasions during the last ten years of his life he performed a very extra ordinary act. He filled the big iron tray of his 'Dhooni' with tobacco. Then he sprinkled a layer of turmeric powder above it. Over it he spread a layer of sugar and rice-flour, maize and wheat. Then he would set this on fire, which would continue for a couple of days till everything burnt. No body was allowed to touch this, not even to poke the fire. Himself he would eat very little during this period and remain lost with his inner self, puffing at the 'Chillum' all the time. His disciple, Shri S.N.Fotedar, who was close to him, mustered courage to ask him the secret behind this act and he explained that it was to propitiate *'Mahakala'*, the god of death, in order to save the life of someone. Thus he had not only conquered his senses, the hunger and other mundane desires but was capable of stalling death as well, whenever there was a need for that. Nachiketa was undaunted in approaching Yama, the mythological god of death and asking him the secret about life after death but Bhagavaan Ji was in a position to order him to defer deaths and ensure compliance to his desires.

Bhagavaan Ji had no interest in any goods or in money. He was an *'Apta-kama'*, one who had achieved all that he wanted and

desired. Whatever the devotees and other visitors offered him or placed before him he would have it distributed among all present as 'Prashada'. Be it candy, sugar, fruits or some cooked dishes. He would give toffees to children who came to him. He would get the currency notes with higher denomination changed into one Rupee notes and then distribute the money among Sadhus visiting Kashmir for pilgrimage to Swami Amarnath and other shrines giving one Rupee to each of them. His sister was at pains to remonstrate that giving away all the money to Sadhus when there was nothing left for their own household needs was surprising. He, however, knew that the need of these Sadhus was far more pressing. The Sadhus also acknowledged that a single Rupee from Bhagavaan Ji opened up other avenues for them and they got sufficient money to meet their requirements. Himself he had no need for any money. A puff at his 'Chillum' fulfilled all his needs. With a pinch from the ashes of his 'Dhooni' he would cure the ailments of those in pain, relieve people of their suffering, and satisfy their needs. A penetrating gaze of his dazzling eyes, a touch of the tong or pincer of his 'Dhooni' or a puff at his 'Chillum' or a sip of his leftover tea in the cup would transmit a spiritual message to any genuine seeker and guide an ardent 'Sadhaka'. He had the capacity to withstand even the items otherwise harmful and injurious like Hashish, Bhanga, Dhatoora, and Charas etc. He, however, knew that these things were not good for ordinary people. Once when someone took away a few balls of Bhanga stealthily and pocketed them, he advised him to tie these in a handkerchief. Soon thereafter these balls turned into a black cobra, which crept slowly towards the 'Asana' of Bhagavaan Ji. This was his way of educating the delinquent about the folly of taking to drugs without having the necessary spiritual strength to tolerate these and to ward off the bad effects thereof.

One is reminded of two very interesting episodes in the life of another great sage, Reshi Peer. He was asked by some Muslim priests to dine with them. He agreed on the condition that nobody tasted any of the dishes prepared on the occasion before these were served to him. When every invitee was seated the covers were removed from the individual plates and presently every single item was found in its original raw uncooked state, rice, vegetables et al. Even chickens were found live and walking around. Reshi Peer

pointed out to a limping chicken whose one leg had already been consumed by the cook. On another occasion he was again invited to dine with some Muslims. He agreed but forbade his disciples from partaking the feast. They were taken by surprise by this apparent double standard. Reshi Peer read their mind and led them to the riverbank where he took out his intestines from his mouth, washed them in the river water and then swallowed them back. He bade his disciples to follow suit. They fell at his feet and begged of him to pardon them for equating themselves with him. Similar was the case with Bhagavaan Ji. He was a saint of very great spiritual powers and how could anyone venture to copy his actions. Taking intoxicants for him was not for satisfying senses but to get absorbed with the Divine and experience eternal bliss. He had achieved a lasting joy and was not after any temporary pleasures.

Sometimes devotees would bring some items for his personal use. They would bring dresses for him and he would accept these with love and affection whether these were costly clothes made of Pashmina wool, Silk or ordinary Cotton-cloth. If a devotee insisted that he should wear it he would oblige him by wearing it there and then. Sometimes he would wear a few dresses one over the other in order to please everyone equally. Some people would bring cooked dishes. These would be distributed among those present. Once it was observed that a devotee had brought a small packet of some pancakes, (Chapatis) with a few fried meatballs. He was feeling hesitant and awkward to offer the packet because he found sizeable quantities of a variety of dishes brought in by other devotees. After sometime when he was nearer to Bhagavaan Ji he quietly asked him to bring out whatever he had brought. Hesitation gone, he was emboldened to place his gift of love before his beloved Bab.

One is reminded of the visit of Sudhama in the court of Sri Krishna where he was feeling awkward to offer the packet of fried rice-powder, 'Sattu' brought by him for his childhood friend. But the Omniscient Lord snatched the packet from him and ate it with all the enthusiasm at his command. It is not for nothing that this saint of our times is addressed as Bhagavaan Ji. He would accept anything brought with love and faith in the true spirit of the Gita. *"Patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayachchhati, tad-aham*

bhaktyupahritam ashnami prayatatmanah – whoever offers me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I accept that considering it the pious offering of the pure in heart." Love is a great force. It makes anything possible. Shakespeare has said in one of his poems about love:

> 'Love is not love, which alters when it alteration finds
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom'.

Bhagavaan Ji was gracious to recognize the need of poor parents in want of money to solemnize the marriages of their daughters. Pandit Dina Nath, the family priest of Malla's where Bhagavaan Ji stayed during the last eleven years of his life, was desperate, as he had to solemnize the marriage of his third daughter with only 500 Rupees in his saving account. He was thinking of poisoning either himself or his daughter when he approached him with his problem. Bhagavaan Ji was visibly moved and asked him to come again to him on the third day, which happened to be a *'Somavasya'* (Amavasya that falls on a Monday – there are only two such *amavasyas* in a year and so it is very auspicious) and knock at his door thrice. He was to return if there was no response but when he came and knocked at the door, which was not locked any way, Bhagavaan Ji himself opened the door for him. He saw a drop of water on a lotus petal lying near him that split into three drops. He was asked to have it as holy water, *'Charanamrit'* three times. He did so and Bhagavaan Ji assured him that from that day onwards his pocket would never remain empty and that his daughter would get married within six months thereafter. The marriage was fixed and the priest got 200 Rupees from him. This money in turn brought him all that he needed for the marriage of his daughter from different sources. Nor was his pocket empty at any time thereafter.

In yet another similar instance a lady approached him at the shrine of Kshir Bhawani and told him that the marriage of her daughter was ten days away but the moneylender had backed out of his promise to lend the required amount for the marriage. Bhagavaan Ji emptied his purse and placed the whole amount of Rupees 60 in her hand. His two disciples, Pt. Dina Nath Ticku and

Swami Amritananda were present and he directed the former also to help her. Shri Ticku gave her Rs. 600. After a few days the lady came to the residence of Bhagavaan Ji and offered him some Prashad from the yajna of her daughter's marriage. He observed, 'There was no need for you to bring me this prashada from the marriage yajna as I was all along present there'. Since, however, he was at Srinagar on that day he sure must have been present at the marriage of the girl in his astral body only.

He was compassion personified. There are innumerable instances when he took pity on the suffering and ailing persons and cured them. It has been reported that the ailments cured by him by his spiritual powers included cancer, diabetes, tuberculosis, hemorrhages, brain disorders and malignancies. People would come to him with their problems but he would never give a direct reply to their queries. His answers would invariably be indirect and one had to be very sharp in order to find their purport and meaning in relation to ones own queries. Another contemporary saint, Kasha Kak of Manigam also used to give indirect answers to the queries of the visitors likewise. It was not unusual for these saints to read the minds of all those present and give indirect replies to their doubts and queries. People in large numbers thronged to the residence of Bhagavaan Ji to have his darshan, to touch his lotus feet, to be near him or to serve him. At Chandapora, where he stayed for the last eleven years, the room overflowed and many of them had to sit outside even on the staircase. He was accessible to all whether they came with their problems, or to fulfill their desires or to obtain spiritual guidance or just to enjoy peace of mind away from the worries of their daily routine. He would talk very little and occasionally give a little ash from his dhooni to cure people of their ailments. His mere gaze was soothing and satisfying to many. In his magnanimity he would give prashada even to those who got beating from him with his 'Ahuti'-spoon or iron pincers in the first instance. He would often chase away those of doubtful integrity or ill moral character.

Another characteristic of his was that he would never utter the word 'no'. Even a negative reply would be couched in a positive phrase. For example when he had gone without food for quite a few days and his sister or someone else insisted that he should

take some food and he wanted to refuse he would simply say, 'Oh! We have already had our food'. If he wanted someone seeking permission to leave not to go he would, instead of saying no, simply remark, 'Where is the hurry' and thereby delay his departure. He would always talk in plural while referring to himself. He would say, for example, 'We shall eat.' Or 'Let us go on a pilgrimage.' This shows that he was at a spiritual plane where he identified himself with the universe as the manifestation of the Divine. The Gita states exactly this: '*Sarvabhutastham-atmanam sarvabhutani cha-atmani, ikshate yogayukhtatma sarvatra samadarshinah* – The one whose mind is harmonized by yoga, sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself. He views everything with equanimity'. In fact according to a Pauranic story the entire creation is the result of the desire of the Divine to turn to plurality from His singularity. It is said that He uttered these words, '*Eko'ham bahu syami* – I am one, let me become many' and the creation came into existence.

Bhagavaan Ji may not have been a householder '*Grihasta*' in strict sense of the term, yet as an elder to his nieces and other youngsters he acted as one, although in a detached manner. He would see to it that due regard is shown to a socially important visitor like a son-in-law. When a girl of the family was leaving for her in-law's he would ensure that she got something or the other as a token customary '*Atagath*' (Some cash allowance). Any devotee leaving for his home after attending to various chores like igniting the 'Dhooni', preparing the 'Chillum', putting things in order, would not be allowed to leave without taking with him some '*Prashada*' even if it was a little candy and a pinch of holy ash. He did all yet he did nothing. Inwardly having renounced everything, outwardly he appeared to attend to many worldly matters he was always in a state of equilibrium. His actions were entirely non-volitional. He had nothing to gain from noble and kind acts, yet he was noble and kind. He had no longing for any pleasure and was, therefore devoid of any temptation. He enjoyed the eternal bliss all the time. The net of bondage, ignorance and illusion having been burnt by the fire of '*Vichara*' or deliberation, he had attained a universal and all embracing consciousness, a level of '*Moksha*' or liberation.

CHAPTER V

Attraction for Saints and Shrines

Satamsadbhih sanghah katham-api hi punyena bhavati
(The proximity to noble persons is the result of virtuous deeds.)

From the very early life Bhagavaan Ji used to quote the *'Vakhs'* or the sayings of the olden-day saint-poets. This shows how impressed and influenced he was by these words of wisdom. These 'Vakhs' of Lal Ded, Roop Bhawani and others spoke of the morality and ethics in mundane life as also ways and means to attain the ultimate Truth, Bliss and Emancipation. Right from his childhood he was drawn to spirituality and it was natural for him to be interested in saints and sages and their sayings. As regards the contemporary saints it is well known that he visited Zana Kak Tufchi very frequently. Even after his death he would visit that place, a small single-storeyed hut of one Shri Sat Lal Wangnoo at Habba Kadal. He would attend his annual Nirvana day function and do odd jobs there so much so that many people have concluded that Zana Kak Tufchi must have been his Guru. Bhagavaan Ji was very close to Aftab Joo Wangnoo, who was a disciple of Zana Kak. One Pt. Maheshwar Nath Trisal of Badgam has reported that one day Aftab Joo addressed him thus: 'Goopiya! Have you had darshan?' and he replied, 'I am having darshana'. Thereby he implied that it was a continuing process for him to perceive the presence of the Divine. This is precisely the type of answer Swami Vivekananda got from his master Shri Ramakrishna when he asked him whether he had seen God. His reply was, 'I am seeing Him as I see you'. The Gita also says that the identification of true devotees is that they all the time speak of Him, hear about Him and remain with Him. A 'Mahatma' has been described as one who sees Him in everything everywhere, but such a noble soul is difficult to come by. *'Vasudevah sarvam-iti sa Mahatma su-durlabhah'*.

There were many other saints with whom he was in contact occasionally or frequently. When he was just a young boy of twenties, he would press the feet of a 'Jatadhari' saint by the name of Balak Joo Kaw. It is said that once he addressed him thus: *'Hato Balak Kawa*!' (O Balak Kaw! Meaning a crow). This shows the

spiritual level at which he was at that point of time that he could address an accomplished saint in a casual jocular manner. That he considered him an accomplished saint is clear from the fact that he had preserved the 'Gadvi', a brass pot used for keeping drinking water, received from him with due care. This he had got from him in his 'Ashram' situated at 'Ishaber' very near the famous Shalimar garden on the bank of the Dal Lake. In 1923 while on way to Mattan he is said to have dashed off to see another saint Jeewan Sahib. This shows that he would not stay back whenever there was a chance to see and meet a saint. Even then he is said to have observed that some of them were jugglers and not saints of any substance. Once at Kshir Bhawani he met a saint called Neela Bab. They were together on their return journey when they rested at Dodarhama camping ground. Neela Bab sat by his side and made him uncomfortable by constantly jabbing his elbow but he kept calm. On an enquiry by his disciple he explained that it was an indication of jealousy in spiritual field. It appears from many accounts that Neela Bab used to meet him quite often. Another saint of repute Nanda Bab seems to have been very impressed by his spiritual acumen. It was at his instance that the marriage ceremony of his own disciple, a young girl was solemnized in the proximity of Bhagavaan ji's residence. He withheld her father's death for a day to enable the function to go ahead without any hindrance. Nand Bab foresaw that Bhagavaan Ji was to give up his mortal frame. He came to a house opposite to his residence and kept on gazing towards his window. He grieved at his departure and expressed that additional burden had come on his shoulders because of his departure.

It is said that some contemporary saints also used to visit Bhagavaan Ji from time to time. One of them was Syeda Mole or Syeda Bab as he was called. He would remain seated for some time, receive some 'Prashada' and then retire. Swami Nanda Lal, who lived at Hoshur would send his two disciples with some presents to him whereas himself he never came. Likewise Swami Mastram and Swami Krala Bab (whose Ashram is at Udhampur) also would come to visit him. Bhagavaan Ji's sister's son-in-law once went to see Swami Kash Kak Ji of Manigam. He is reported to have told him, 'How come you are here when Bhagavaan Ji himself is present there in your house'. Some people who have

been close to Ishwar swaroop Swami Laxman Joo have stated that he too would often speak high of Bhagavaan Ji although the two may not have met. Some Sadhus from Varanasi and other holy places also would call on him off and on. Sadhus who came for pilgrimage to Kashmir were regular visitors to his place and would get one Rupee each by way of '*Dakhshina*' or cash allowance from him.

One does not know what relationship he had with these saints. It could be one of a fellow traveller or may be they exchanged their notes on their respective spiritual experiences. Their paths and methods may have been different but they had a common twin aim of attaining the Truth and alleviating the suffering of human beings. About these blessed souls Bhagavad Gita says, '*Machchitta madgatapranah bodhayantah parasparam, kathayantashcha mam nityam tushyanti cha ramanti cha* - With their minds fixed on Me and their life absorbed in Me, they enlighten each other about Me, speak to each other about Me and are ever contented and delighted'. Bhagavaan Ji was so enamoured about saints that he would visit even their *Samadhis,* monuments built at their burial places'. Perhaps he got some sort of eternal peace at these places that enabled him to concentrate on his real self. Once in 1936 on his return from the holy Amarnath cave he is reported to have visited the '*Samadhi*' of Swami Mirza Kak at Hangalgund.

It is also possible that some vibrations emanated from these places made sacred by the presence of these saints, which were useful in communicating spiritual data for the benefit of a seeker. Bhagavaan ji himself and some of his disciples are also reported to have given out vibrations from their different limbs and parts of body. What significance these vibrations had may best be left for the individual experience of these blessed noble souls seeking to know themselves, as it would be beyond the perception of for us, the men of ordinary prudence. Blessed is this land of Kashmir where every village has given birth to a sage who has guided many a seeker and left behind a fund of knowledge. Bagavaan ji might have been an introvert who spoke very little and was seldom communicative, yet he has also given us words of wisdom for our guidance. These shall be discussed in another chapter.

There are some very interesting episodes related to him where

other saints have directed devotees to him or talked about him with reverence. Shri A.N.Fotedar, while working as Divisional Forest Officer in the State Government was once suspended from service on a flimsy ground, although he was innocent. Accompanied by his wife and in a worried state of mind he came across Nanda Bab, a contemporary saint. The saint put a tilak on his forehead and gave him a chit of paper on which he wrote in Urdu that he should put in an appeal before the Emperor of Saints, Gopi Nath Ji who is adorned with seven medals and lives at Chandapora. Shri Fotedar did visit Bhagavaan Ji. There he got answers to many of his doubts about the effect of the stars in one's horoscope. He was also assured that he would be reinstated with some adverse remarks in his service records. He was also informed that his grievances would be redressed only after there was change of Government. All these foreseen events came true and Fotedar was reinstated and all his appeals were accepted.

Shankar Nath Zadoo, a disciple of the Bab was depressed when his wife passed away in May 1970 (two years after Bhagavaan Ji had left his mortal frame). He almost lost his mental balance. His daughter took him to see Satya Sai Baba in Bombay. Surprisingly for them Sai Baba told him that his Guru, Gopi Nath had directed him to help him. He gave him holy ashes, which Shri Zadoo partly consumed and partly smeared on his forehead. He felt an electric current passing through his body and he became perfectly healthy. Sai Baba also remarked that Bhagavaan Ji was the greatest Kashmiri saint, who was a '*Jeewan-mukta*' – a liberated soul in his lifetime. Shri C.L.Moza has stated that one Shri Kanth Koul had revealed to him that somebody from his sister's family once went to see the saint of Manigam, Kash Kak. On seeing him the saint is reported to have said, 'Why have you come to me when you have *Mohtamim Darbar* (Chief of the court) at your home. He is the final sanctioning authority and there is nothing in my hands.' He was also referring to Bhagavaan Ji. Pt. Shridhar Joo Dhar has stated in the foreword to the biography that Shri S.N.Fotedar also was sent to Bhagavaan Ji by another saint Sona Kak ji for spiritual guidance and consequently he used to engage in 'sadhana' for hours together in front of the Master.

Another attraction for Bhagavaan Ji was visiting the important

shrines of Kashmir. Shakti worship has been a very dominant aspect of spiritualism in Kashmir. In this connection there is a small anecdote which goes thus: A saint had come from outside Kashmir to discuss with a local saint how his notion of Shakti worship was superior to other methods of worship. While they were together a milkmaid passed by selling milk. The local Sadhu requested the visiting Sadhu, who was younger in age, to get some milk from her. When the Sadhu asked her to give some milk, she asked him to help her put down the pitcher from her head. He tried his best and even applied his full strength but the pitcher would not budge an inch. The milkmaid taunted him saying, 'It seems you have no Shakti'. The word shakti had a pun on it. It meant that he had no strength and also that he did not believe in Shakti worship. The Sadhu got the answer and touched the feet of the local saint.

There are many shrines in Kashmir dedicated to Shakti, the mother Goddess in Her different forms, including the trio of Sharika at Hari Parbat, Rajna at Tula Mula and Jwala at Khrew. Divine Mother was one of the five deities he used to worship from his childhood. Hari Parbat was the first shrine he used to go daily for circumambulation for a long period. This shrine is on a hillock in Srinagar and is dedicated to Goddess Sharika. It is here that we find the famous Shri Chakra because of which the shrine is also known as 'Chakreshwari'. The great Mughal King Akbar is said to have got a huge wall constructed all around the hillock, with a few huge entry gates. At the first entry gate is the Ganesha temple. There are temples dedicated to other deities at various spots around the hillock but the main shrine is 'Chakreshwari', to reach where one has to climb a good number of steps. At the foothill is 'Devi-angan' or the courtyard of the Goddess. The exit gate is called 'Kathi Darwaza' inside which there is another shrine with a holy spring within it called the shrine of Pokhribal. It was here that he would offer services to de-silt the spring. Later he would stay in an open hut at Devi Aangan, puffing at his 'Chillum' and absorbed in his contemplation. It was here that he showed the Divine Mother to a seeker in the form of a beautiful small girl. It was here that he offered her '*Nadarmonja*' – a savoury preparation – with his own hands. He would go to this famous shrine of Sharika Bhagavati sometimes in the afternoon and spend the night in the house of one Shri Saligram, a priest at the temple. Once he stayed in the house of

Pt. Ram Joo, another priest for about nine months near the sacred hillock. He seems to have been so close to the Goddess that she again appeared in the form of a small girl for him and for another person, Nila Koul to see at the spring of Pokhribal inside the exit gate called Kathi darwaza. These two incidents of seeing the Goddess in the form of a small girl are reported to have taken place during the period from 1937 to 1946, while he was staying at Dalhasanyar in the house of Shri Nila Koul Saraf. There are accounts by various devotees that Goddess Sharika used to send her mount 'Lion' to Bhagavaan Ji for him to ride on its back from his residence to Hari Parbat. Such saints can switch over from formless '*Nirakara*' worship to with-form '*Sakara*' worship at will. While they perceive the Divine in the form of the Being, the Universal Consciousness and the Eternal Bliss (*Sat, Chit and Ananda*) it is also within their easy reach to see Him in the human form, converse with Him, serve Him and at times play with Him. That is the type of access Bhagavaan Ji appears to have had. Blessed are those who have seen the Goddess in one form or the other. A saint from Kashi, Amrit Vagbhavachari was camping in a village in Kashmir expecting Goddess Sharada to appear before him. When he did not see her for a few days he was sad. Presently somebody came with an old manuscript written in Sharada script. Swami Ji wanted to know what the book contained and therefore, summoned a local Pandit to read the book. It was opened at random somewhere in the middle and the passage read indicated that Goddess Sharada appears before her devotees in the form of three mynas. Swami Ji was on his feet and exclaimed that he had been seeing a set of three mynas every morning after his daily sanndhya. Next morning he saw them again, bowed with reverence and having accomplished his mission moved on to other pilgrim centres.

The shrine of Maharajna or Kshir Bhawani at Tula Mula is another holy place that attracted him. This place is about 28 Kms north of Srinagar. There is an L- shaped spring in the middle of which is the marble temple dedicated to Goddess Maharajna, the consort of Shiva. Some say that the shape of the spring resembles a cloth bag held in their hand by those who tell the beads of a rosary kept within it. The colour of the water in the spring changes from time to time. There is an iron fencing around the area paved with stone slabs with huge Chinar trees covering the entire place. Outside

there is a row of Dharmashalas with shops at the ground floor. On the side of the shrine flows a canal of the mighty Sindhu, which joins the Vitasta at the point called Prayag. So it is possible to reach this shrine through the land and river routes. There is a legend that this Goddess was originally at Shri Lanka and non-vegetarian offerings were made to her there. After getting tired of all this she expressed a desire to shift her abode from there. Eventually Hanuman brought her to this place and it was ordained that only milk and candy lumps called *'Kand'* will be offered to the holy spring. Because of this prescription she was given the name 'Kshir Bhawani' or the milk Goddess. You can hear vendors at the railing of the shrine, calling out with these words, *'Doda haen baeviv, tami saet praeviv* – make an offering of milk here in the spring and you will have your desires fulfilled.'

Bhagavaan Ji would stay at this place for a few months at a stretch although normally people go there for pilgrimage for a few days around the eighth day of the bright fortnight of every lunar month. He would seldom be seen worshipping near the spring or the temple. Mostly he would stay in a hut with his usual 'Chillum'. Often he would prepare food himself and feed other pilgrims as well. A devotee who could not see any justification for his remaining away from the holy spring had a glimpse of the Goddess on a resplendent throne with Bhagvaan ji sitting nearby puffing his 'Chillum'. This incident showed his proximity to the Goddess and the fact that She was always with him wherever he may have been. This incident again is in line with the tradition of great sages of Kashmir. It is said that once Roop Bhawani and a Muslim Sufi-saint were standing on the opposite banks of a river. The Sufi addressed her thus, 'O Ropi (literally Silver) come over to my side and I shall turn you to *'So'n'* (literally Gold)'. The Bhawani retorted, 'You cross over to this bank and I shall turn you to *'Mokhta'* (literally a pearl and a liberated one)'. First the Sufi was seen crossing over in a boat as a boatman where Shiva and Paravati were seated in the middle of the boat. The Bhawani did not approve of it and in a moment the Sufi saw her crossing the river in a boat sitting by the side of Shiva as his consort Paravati. Bhagavaan ji has upheld this tradition by showing himself seated by the side of Goddess Maharajna and thereby exhibiting his spiritual heights. It was at this shrine that the famous musician Jagannath Shivpuri saw him

for the first time evincing interest in the devotional and classical music.

Strange as it may seem the Kashmiri Pandits have three sections, each one owing allegiance to Goddess Sharika, Maharajna or Jwala. For Bhagavaan Ji the three were one and the same *'Shakti'*, the vibrant energy aspect of the Shiva. Naturally, therefore, he could not ignore the third important shrine of Jwala Ji at village Khrew. This place is about 30 Kms Southeast of Srinagar. The temple of Jwala Ji is on a hillock and at the foot of the hillock there is a large spring for devotees to take a bath before going up the hill for worship. He would visit this place for three or four days every year. It is at this shrine that he performed a miracle like the one performed by Alakheeshwari more than a century earlier. He visited this place accompanied by his elder sister and a few other devotees from his residence at Dalhasanyar. He asked about fifty pilgrims to dine with them when the rice in the pot was hardly sufficient for four or five persons. His sister was alarmed but he directed her to cover the pot every time she served rice to a person. Hesitatingly she went on serving rice to all the people and to her astonishment even after serving the entire gathering some more rice was still left in the alloy-cooking vessel called *'Degchi'* in Kashmiri. Jesus Christ also is reported to have fed several thousand hungry persons with just five loaves and two cooked fishes. In the case of Alakheeshwari Roop Bhawani her father had sent a vessel-full of rice pudding to her in-laws, which was considered insufficient by her mother-in-law. Bhawani requested her to distribute the pudding as much as she desired. Out of vengeance she distributed it in large quantities to all and sundry but the pot did not get emptied and some quantity was still left when every one had been served. There is a tailpiece to the story. The mother-in-law asked how she was to return the pot to her father's house. Bhawani herself took the pot in the morning, dropped it in the flow of the river with instructions to reach her father performing 'Sandhya' at the riverbank at that hour. The pot reached safely to its destination as commanded by her.

Bhagavaan Ji seems to have been absorbed not only with 'Shakti' but also with Shiva. He undertook pilgrimage to Swami Amarnath twice, once in 1936 and again in 1946. During his first

trip another saint Swami Aftab Joo Wangnoo and some others accompanied him. On return from the holy cave he visited other holy places including Hangalgund and Uma nagri at Brari Angan, where there are holy springs dedicated to the triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. The second trip comprised a large group of thirteen people including his elder sister. The journey from Srinagar to Pahalgam was covered by bus and thereafter ponies were engaged. Himself he preferred to travel on foot. His sister rode a pony at first much against his wishes but after a little distance she fell off the pony and had to travel on foot thereafter. On the day of 'Darshan' he and some others stayed a few steps below the 'Ice-Lingam'. They saw him gazing upwards where three idols of Siva, Paravati and Ganesha were seen clearly. Sitting at that distance Bhagavaan Ji offered a coconut to the Lord, which vanished under his armpit inside the 'Pheran' he was wearing. During this trip also he performed quite a few miracles as reported by Shri B.N.Handoo. These will be described in a subsequent chapter.

Another well-known pilgrimage centre that attracted him was the shrine of Jyeshtha Bhagawati at Zeethyaer about five Kms. to the south of Srinagar. The shrine is on an elevated spot very near the cantonment and the palace called Gulab Bhawan. He used to visit this place occasionally and spend two or three nights there. There was a short cut to the shrine by the side of the palace and once it was barricaded by putting up barbed wire under the orders of the then Maharaja Hari Singh. One night, while it was snowing, Bhagavaan Ji accompanied by a devotee set off for the shrine. Reaching there they found the short cut blocked and both had to crawl underneath the wire in order to reach the shrine. This inconvenience caused by the barricade perhaps prompted him to say that the Maharaja will have to quit. It was only a few years after this incident that the Maharaja had actually to leave Kashmir as a consequence of the Pakistan-sponsored tribal invasion on the state.

The two, Bhagavaan Ji and the devotee recited 'Panchastavi' during the night. 'Panchastavi' is a popular text comprising, as the name indicates, five '*Stavas*' or hymns in praise of Goddess 'Tripur Sundari'. Earlier the devotee had expressed a desire to have a glimpse of Jyeshtha Bhagavati. At about 4 a.m. while they were

reciting chapter 4, 'Ambastava' of the 'Panchastavi' Bhagavaan Ji asked the devotee to look towards the holy spring there. As soon as he turned his gaze towards the spring, he saw a dazzling light as bright as that of many a Sun. He was directed immediately to sit down lest the dazzle should blind his eyes. There is a tradition of offering non-vegetarian dishes at this shrine. People bring here yellow rice cooked with turmeric powder and the sheep-liver for offering. On one such occasion some pilgrims had brought these preparations and after performing pooja they gave some portion of these preparations to Bhagavaan ji as 'Prashada' who accepted the same and began eating it. Just then a Sadhu came on the scene and began abusing everyone present for this non-vegetarian offering, which according to him was sinful and an act of sacrilege. Bhagavaan Ji was annoyed at his conduct and cursed him with these words, '*Peyinay shutul-bud*' meaning 'may you be inflicted with small pox'. Soon after he got fever and small pox appeared all over his body. He repented and begged of Bhagavaan Ji to forgive him. He ordered him to leave the shrine immediately but comforted him that he would get well after a few days.

Nine miles from Srinagar and very near the famous Nishat Garden on the banks of the Dal Lake, there is a pilgrimage centre called 'Guptaganga', meaning the hidden Ganges. Bhagavaan Ji spent about nine months at this place in 1949, as against two or three days during his annual routine visit. Big wooden logs were burnt in his 'Dhooni' on this occasion. Perhaps this was a period of his intense 'Sadhana', when he must have concentrated on the Divine in His Shiva form. As the Ganges is mythologically connected with Shiva he must have chosen 'Guptaganga' for this spiritual exercise. The room where he stayed has become a place of pilgrimage in itself. Shri Sanjay Nehru has recorded that when he visited this place on a Baisakhi day in 1996, along with Bhagavaan Ji's some close relatives, he found the room in the same clay-coated condition. It is stated that Radha Devi, a contemporary saint came to see him at this place. She was advised by him not to roam about but be confined to one place and seek the truth there. It is reported that she did likewise and did not leave her room till her last breath in this mortal world.

About 100 Kms. north of Srinagar there is a famous shrine of

'Bhadra Kali' in Handwara Tehsil. He visited this place along with some of his devotees, his sister and Swami Amritananda in 1962 after having spent sometime at Tulamula. He started his 'Dhooni' in an open space just below the shrine. He pronounced that gusts of wind were due from the North and ordered his devotees to leave lest these should blow them off. Only his sister and the Swami were allowed to stay on. Soon thereafter the Chinese invasion on Indian Territory took place in Ladakh region, which was the direction he had referred to.

There are eight shrines dedicated to eight different Bhairavas in Kashmir. One of these is the shrine of 'Turshkaraza Bhairav' situated in Narsingarh on the outskirts of Karan Nagar and on the banks of a small waterway called 'Doodganga'. Bhagavaan Ji considered this place very auspicious for seekers perhaps because the place is pious and the atmosphere here is congenial for spiritual exercise, yoga and penance. He would spend three or four days at this place every year in quiet solitude. Legend has it that this place has been the abode of many saints in the past as well. Incidentally the name of this Bhairav literally means the King of Turushkas, a dynasty that ruled Kashmir for sometime.

Once he visited the shrine of Gautam Nag along with his companion Bola Nath Ji and his daughter's family. A strange incident took place at this place. Although no non-vegetarian dishes are allowed there, the group took along with them a dish of fish curry also at the instance of Bhagavaan Ji. After having darshan they sat by the side of the holy spring and had their meals including the cooked fish. Swami Gash Kak ji, who was in charge of the shrine was very cross with them and took objection to their having non-vegetarian item at the holy shrine, even though it was strictly forbidden. He was particularly annoyed with Bhagavaan ji for having violated the code of conduct in spite of being a saint himself. He did not lose his calm and in a mild tone denied having taken any fish. Gash Kak was furious and charged him of speaking a lie to him. He put his two fingers inside his mouth and instantaneously two live fishes came out and jumped into the water of the holy spring and swam away. Gash Kak Ji was flabbergasted and prostrated before him seeking forgiveness.

He once visited Trisandhya, a tunnel shaped spring, which remains otherwise dry but only during the prescribed festival season water gushes forth a couple of times during a day. During his visit the water gushed out as many as eight times. Soon a woman appeared and wanted to take a dip in the holy spring. Every time she approached the spring would get dry. She prayed for the intervention of Bhagavaan Ji. In a very angry tone he reminded her that when there was fire in her house she had not cared to free the cows from her cowshed and had let them get burnt. She had thus committed the gravest sin of '*Gau-hatya*' or murder of the cows, because of which she could not be allowed to have a dip in the holy water of Trisandhya. As soon as the lady went away water in the spring reappeared. Incidentally there is a saying in Kashmiri, '*Trisandhya, Rudrasandhya, Pawansandhya Kaerzihe adai maerzihe toti kentsha. Harshwar, tsarshwar ta Mahadev kaerzihe adai maerzihe toti kentshah* – It would be real luck if one were to die after undertaking pilgrimage to the shrines of Trisandhya, Rudrasandhya and Pawansandhya or those at Harishwar, Tsarshwar and Mahadev'. Such is the importance attached to the pilgrimage centers like Trisandhya. There were other pilgrim centers also which attracted him and he visited these places occasionally. These included Mahadev and Vitsarnag. There used to be a big congregation of pilgrims at Vitsarnag on Chaitra Amavasya, on the eve of the New Year Day. People would take a dip in the holy spring and offer pooja at the temple. It was also customary for pilgrims going to Tulamula for pilgrimage to offer first pooja at this shrine before proceeding further. And why not, '*Vichara*' or thought must precede '*Kriya*' or action.

CHAPTER VI

Physical Movement and Spiritual Ascent

Aneka janma sansiddhah tato yanti param gatim.
(Cumulative efforts of many births lead one to an exalted position.)

Bhagvaan Ji has had to change his residence ten times during his lifetime. These changes have coincided with the changes in the mode of his worship and method of his spiritual quest. Whether it was by accident or by design is shrouded in mystery. He spent his childhood and boyhood in his own house (9years) and in the houses of Pt. Shiv Ji Khyberi (1½years), Keshav Joo Nagri (3years) and Kailash Joo Bhan (1½years). In between he lost his mother when he was about twelve years of age. In the meantime he finished his schooling and whatever mundane and secular studies he was required to do. The prime of his youth was spent in the houses of Pt. Prasad Joo Parimoo, his maternal grandfather (7 years), Keshav Joo Dhar (3years) and Dina Nath Bota (6years). This was the period of spiritual struggle for him and the death of his father in the house of Shri Bota at Rangateng seems to have added fuel to the fire that was burning in the heart of this young man for seeking the Truth and realizing the Divine. If he was moving from place to place physically, mentally and spiritually he was struggling to determine the path he should take to reach his goal. From this point of his life his spiritual ascend was uninterrupted and there was no looking back for him. It is noteworthy that barring three houses the owners of the remaining houses where he stayed from time to time were not related to their family in any way. Most of them were his devotees, who sought spiritual awakening from his august presence. All of these noble souls deserve accolades that a divine saint of the stature of Bhagavaan Ji should have chosen to grace their residences by his august presence for long periods. They are no less pious than Nanda Rai and Yashodha of Gokul in whose house Shri Krishna spent his childhood.

There are five hymns relating to Ganesha, Guru. The Divine Mother, Narayana and Shiva written by him in his own hand. There are two large sized 'Omkaras' in Sharada script drawn by him

around which is written Rama- Rama on one and Shiva-Shiva on the other. In addition he has left behind a prayer to the Guru and a Tantric Mantra in Sharada script written by him. These records show that initially he had tried to tread on a beaten track in as much as he worshipped the 'Adi-Deva' Ganesh, the Guru, the Divine Mother as also Vishnu and Shiva. This did not satisfy him and he settled for the worship of the Divine Mother at first and later that of Shiva. He is reported to have had a vision of the Divine Mother yet the '*Bhakti marga*' or the path of devotion does not seem to have suited his psyche although the Divine Mother appeared before him and his fellow travellers at his beckoning in the form of a girl. His path was the path of intense penance, search within, control of senses, command on the eight elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether, Mind, Wisdom and the Ego ('I' ness). "*Bhumir-apo-analo vayuh, kham mano buddhir ahankara.*" These eight elements form the eightfold mode of the lower nature of the Divine according to the Gita, '*Apara prakriti*'. As against this the Divine has the higher mode of his nature called the '*Para prakriti*', through which He sustains the entire world of animate and inanimate objects. '*Aparayem itastvanyam prakritim viddhi me param jeeva-bhutam Mahabaho yayedam dharyate jagat* – Different from that is my higher mode of nature by which this universe is upheld.'

The year 1930 appears to have been a watershed in the spiritual life of Bhagavaan Ji. He shifted to the house of Pt. Tika Lal at Ranga Teng, where he lived for a period of six years. It was here that he plunged into yoga sadhana and a rigorous penance. He would remain lying on a bed facing the wall while a lamp would be burning in the room round the clock. As reported by his sister nobody was allowed into the room except a chosen few including her younger daughter, Chanda Ji. Layers and layers of dust would accumulate on his bed and all over. Cobwebs and spiders would be seen on the ceiling and the walls in the nook and corner but he would not permit the room to be cleaned. He would take handfuls of Datura seeds, opium, 'panak' and other intoxicants during this period of intense penance and remain absorbed with his spiritual exercise, contemplation and concentration, totally unmindful of his physical existence. He would not broach any disturbance or hindrance to his inner experimentation. Physically he would be seen indulging in extremes of either fasting for months together or

eating vehemently in bulk. This state of affairs lasted a good seven years and Bhagavaan Ji came out unscathed – an emancipated seeker with a badly weakened body but a vibrant soul. He appears to have had a glimpse of the Divine on the culmination of this seven years' penance.

He also gained a vision of the past the present and the future called *'Trikala-drishti'* and became a *'Siddha'*, the perfect saint. Now he was ready to transmit to his disciples the spiritual achievements he had acquired, relieve people of their suffering, foresee the coming events and issue commands to the nature. He was a wave that had merged with the ocean, a spark that had mingled with the fire, a part that had become a complete whole, an individual being that had become the universe. His limited 'I' bound by the limitations of time and space had attained the position of an unlimited 'I' sans boundaries sans limitations. He, an individual soul had become the universal soul and no wonder, therefore, that he got the title of ***'Jagad Guru'*** – Preceptor of the world. His *'Tapas'* or the penance of the past births had come to fruition and he had attained all that for which he had taken birth in the human form. He had established a relationship between his soul and the Absolute Reality. He had reached the state of pure consciousness and realized his own immortality. This is the state that in Kashmir Shaiva Darshan parlance is called *'Shambhavi avastha'* or the state in which the seeker is merged with the Divine. It would not be out of place to quote a 5th Century Christian Monk, Dionysius the Areopagite to emphasise that the ultimate is not different viewed from any angle. He says, 'Then beyond all distinction between knower and known, the aspirant becomes merged in the nameless formless Reality, wholly absorbed in That, which is beyond all things and in nothing else....Having stilled his intellect and mind he is united by his highest faculty with That which is beyond all knowing.'

Now came the take off time for Bhagavaan Ji. He along with his brother and sister moved to the house of Pt. Neela Koul Saraf at Dalhasanyar in 1937. Here he stayed for ten long years. In this house he chose a seat on the second floor near a window. This was on purpose because from here both the Hari Parvat and the Shankaracharya hill were in full view. This perhaps enabled him to remain in constant touch with Shiva and Shakti both, the

Absolute and His Energy aspect with which He creates, sustains and absorbs the entire universe. He was perhaps able to tune in the Divine on the wavelength of his own thought process all the time. The temple on the Shankaracharya hill has the 'Lingam'; the symbol of the Cosmos and Hari Parvat is the *'Shakti Peetha'*, the seat of the Divine Mother with *'Shri Chakra'*, the symbol of Divinity in relation to the entire creation of its making. Both together complete the whole picture of the universe in its totality. Even according to the Kashmir Shaiva Philosophy *'Prakasha-roopa Shiva'* and its inseparable *'Vimarsha-roopa Shakti* cause this creation as a result of Shiva's free sport called *'Leela'*. According to the Manu Smriti human life is divided into four periods called *'Ashramas'*. The first is *'Brahmacharya'*, the period of celibacy. The second is *'Grihasta'*, the period of household. The third is *'Vanaprastha'*, the period of forest dwelling and the fourth is *'Sanyasa'*, the period of renunciation. In the case of the saints like Bhagavaan Ji there are only three periods in their human life, *'Sadhana'*, the period of spiritual exercise, *'Prapti'*, the period of achievement and *'Anugraha'* the period of showering grace on others. This period of *'Anugraha'* or showering grace on others, radiating light and illumining their path in his case began in 1937 and continued for a period of over 30 years. During this period he remained absorbed with his Self yet helped people in fulfilling their worldly needs like employment, marriage of their kiths, cure of their ailments and so on.

He initiated many a disciple into a spiritual quest including a Sikh saint, who had come from outside and Pt. Maheshwar Nath Zutshi of Mallapora, who was directed by the Divine Mother to seek spiritual guidance from him. He treated him to a meal, offered him a drink and made him have a puff from his 'Chillum' and that was all what was needed by him to get the message he was after. Long back before Bhagavaan Ji, a great saint Krishna Kar, who was directed by the Divine to initiate Reshi Peer called on his house. Not finding him there he had a puff at a 'Huqqa', the hubble-bubble and left instructions that the 'Chillum' on the 'Huqqa' should not be disturbed. When Reshi peer returned he had a go at the same 'Huqqa' and this way he got spiritually initiated. Bhagavaan Ji also followed this method of initiating his disciples. At times he would be seen speaking to someone invisible, sometimes speaking indirectly without giving a direct response to the question asked

or enquiry made and sometimes lost in the world of his own. He would still go to Hari Parvat and stay there for a few hours. He would visit the shrine at Tulamula and occasionally offer milk and flowers in the holy spring but normally he would straightaway dash to a hut there without even taking the customary dip in the Sindhu canal and start with his 'Chillum'. Another interesting thing that he started during this period was to use his 'Kangri', the fire pot used for warming purposes during winter, as the sacred fire and put oblations into it. This would continue for hours on end.

From Dalhasanyar he shifted to Rishi Mohalla in the year 1947 into the house of Pt.Madhav Joo Sathoo, who was married to his niece, Chanda Ji. He stayed here also for a good ten years and continued with his activities of guiding the seekers, spreading his radiance, helping the needy and showing miracles of sorts. Occasionally he would go to visit some prominent shrines. Perhaps the divinity of these holy places, the serenity prevailing there and the mysterious vibrations of these pilgrim centres attracted him. His receiving vibrations from unknown sources and emitting vibrations from various parts of the body have been vouched by many devotees who had had the good fortune of his company and proximity to his lotus feet. Here also he continued the practice of blowing into the fire constantly with utmost concentration. At times the burning charcoal from this fire would fall off on to his dress, burn it at places resulting in gaping holes but he would remain undisturbed and unmindful of all this. Perhaps he was concentrating on the element of fire, which was considered as the fundamental substance even by the Greek Philosopher, Heraclitus (500 B.C.) who said, 'All things come out of the one and the one out of all things but the many have less reality than the one, which is God.' The fire is at the centre stage in the Vedas also. In fact the fire is next only to Indra in importance in entire Vedic literature.

During this period Bhagavaan Ji's birthday used to be celebrated with great pomp and show on a large scale. More than five hundred people would be served a rice meal as reported by his devotees who have been eyewitness to and part of these celebrations. His family priest would perform the customary birthday Pooja. While this ritual would go on he himself would offer oblations into the fire of his 'Dhooni'. There would be a

programme of instrumental music with Santoor etc. that would continue till the wee hours of the next morning. He would put tilak on all those attending the function and distribute 'Prashada' of candy among them as also a pinch of ash from the sacred fire.

The husband of Bhagavaan Ji's niece died in 1957. Kishni Ji, his younger daughter approached him and said that in the absence of both her parents they were feeling forlorn and lonely and had none to look after them. Instantaneously he took his 'Chillum' in his hand and the blanket over his shoulders and proceeded to their house at Chondapora, with his elder sister. This house turned out to be his last resting place. He lived there for eleven years till he gave up his mortal frame in 1968. He started his 'Dhooni' here in an iron sigdi and kept it burning the whole day from morning to evening. He continued to blow at burning charcoal incessantly here also for hours together. In addition he got a round wide-mouthed earthenware vessel and filled it with water. He placed a brass basin over it with a metal tumbler in it, both filled with water. He would fix his gaze at it continuously as if penetrating deep into the essence of this third basic element of water after earth and fire. While the Indian Philosophers conceived of eight elements from the hoary past, the Greek Philosopher Thales (620 to 550 B.C), a native of Miletus in Asia Minor believed in only one element of water. He said that everything was made of water and earth also rested on water only.

In puffing at his 'Chillum' he would perhaps be concentrating on the element of air also, which according to another Greek Philosopher Anaximenes (570 to 510 B.C.) was the fundamental substance. He held that the soul also was air only and fire was nothing but rarified air and that the condensed air became water first, then earth and finally stone. This is corroborated by the Sanskrit word *'Atma'* for soul, which is almost akin to 'Atmos' meaning air from which is derived the word 'Atmosphere'. While puffing at his 'Chillum' Bhagavaan Ji would usually be looking upwards indicating his interest in the fifth essential element of the ether, *'Akasha'*. Those who gained proximity to him could see or at least get a feel of the manner in which he was achieving control over these five basic elements of nature. It was very difficult for any one to perceive his mastery over the remaining three elements

of *'Man, Buddhi, Ahankar'*, mind, intellect and the ego. The fact that he was able to foresee events, defer deaths, remove suffering, cure ailments and perform miracles of sorts clearly shows that Bhagavaan Ji had firm control on these subtle elements as well. The control over these three abstract elements enabled him to transcend time and space and overcome all the limitations and barriers of sorts.

It was usual for sadhus to come to see and meet Bhagavaan Ji. Some of them were termed as mere jugglers by him although he gave the customary *'dakshina'*, a cash allowance of one rupee to each of them also. Some were spiritually very advanced. Of these some looked upon Bhagavaan Ji as a *'Siddha'* or one who has attained the truth and some as a Yogi. According to the Gita there are four ways of yoga but only two types of *'Nishtha'* or faith. The four ways of yoga are, *Rajayoga, Jnanayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga.* The two types of *'Nishtha'* are Jnana and Karma. If one looks at his life, ways, habits and mannerism in totality one would without hesitation conclude that Bhagavaan Ji practised Jnana so far as the *'Nishtha'* is concerned. Regarding, however, the path of Yoga he seems to have experimented with all the four ways. Going to shrines and worshipping there, and having *'Sakshatkara'* or the vision of the Divine Mother in the form of a girl indicate that he practised Bhakti. His Dhooni and oblations into the holy fire showed the period of his Karmayoga. His remaining absorbed with his 'Chillum', occasional seclusion and intense 'Sadhana' show his experimentation with Jnana. Finally his ecstatic behaviour, indirect conversation and occasional appearance in astral form at various places show his transcendental Raja yoga.

What brought him emancipation and what gave him the spiritual height of a rare order, nobody knows. However, one thing is clear that he had attained *'Moksha'* through his spiritual insight, *'Jnana'*. It is rightly said, *'Jnanena cha-apavargo-* it is through knowledge that one gets liberated'. Righteousness takes one to spiritual heights, *'Dharmena gamanam-urdhvam'*, lack of righteousness throws one in the abyss, *'Gamanam-adhastad-bhavati-adharmena'*, and through sub-conscious aspirations 'Vasana' one is tied to vice and virtue, *'Viparyayadishyate bandhah'*. Knowing these facts fully well Bhagavaan Ji seems to have cleaned his mind of all

conscious and sub-conscious aspirations and inclinations. He was *'Vasana-rahita'* and had instinctively and intuitionally directed his mind and soul towards the Divine. He was a *'Jeevana-mukta'* – an emancipated soul during his lifetime. He had transcended all distinctions of being and non-being, right and wrong, true and false, loss and gain, respect and disrespect, love and hate. Even when circumstances demanded of him to attend to some worldly chores or family problems, he did it in a dispassionate and detached manner. He lived like a lotus in a pool of water, unscathed and unaffected, *'Padmapatram-iva-ambasa'*.

Bhagavaan Ji had controlled the five elements of *'Maya'* or the illusion. These elements are 1.*Vidya* representing limited knowledge, 2.*Kalaa* representing limitations of action, 3.*Raga* representing imperfection, 4. *Kaala* representing impermanence and 5. *Niyati* representing limitations of space. He had attained perfect freedom denoted by the five essential features of 1. *Chit* representing complete knowledge, 2. *Nirvriti* representing unlimited action, 3. *Ichchha* representing perfection, 4. *Jnana* representing permanence and 5. *Kriya* representing universality. This perfect freedom had widened his vision and given him control over all the elements. It needed a discerning eye to go beyond his outward appearance and fathom his true nature. Those who have seen him closely have stated that he was usually looking upwards while busy with his 'Chillum'. His gaze was fixed above towards ceiling and the sky. This shows that state of unfaltering yoga which has been described in the Gita in this shloka: '*Etam vibhuti yogam cha mama yo vetti tattvatah, so'vikampena yogena yujyate natra sanshayah* – One who knows me and my glory in essence, undoubtedly possesses unfaltering yoga'. He was no doubt such a yogi and had known the Divine and revelled in His glory. Therefore he did not live in the present alone but in the eternity, where the divisions of past present and future are unknown.

According to Trika philosophy there are three types of yoga practiced by *'Sadhakas'*. These are as follows: 1. *Shambhava* method of yoga: This method consists of practices in direct realization of the truth without resorting to any mental efforts in knowing, meditating and contemplating. 2. *Shakta* method of yoga: This method consists of many types of practices in contemplation on

the real essence of the self. 3. *Anava* method of yoga: This method comprises various practices in contemplative meditation on other entities like sense, life-force, physical form, nerve centers and breath as also different aspects of time and space. There is yet another method of yoga, which is called *'Anupaya'*. Whereas there are no alternatives in *'Shambhavopaya'* and whereas *'Shaktopaya'* consists in intense concentration, the *'Anavopaya'* is the control of breath with the help of *'Mantras'*. In *'Anupaya'*, however the seeker has only to observe. He acts but is detached. Here he gets directly connected with the eternal bliss of Shiva. From all accounts about our master known from his disciples and others who had access to him or had observed him closely, it appears that the yoga practised by him was of the category of *'Anupaya'* for he acted and yet acted not and all the time he was one with Lord Shiva, lost in his ecstasy. What better example of *'Anupaya'* one can have?

For a seeker and a spiritual practitioner there are two broad paths to choose from. One is the path of complete detachment of an ascetic called *'Nivritti marga'*. The other is the path of full involvement of a householder known as *'Pravritti marga'*. Our Master had chosen a unique way of his own. He was completely detached while all the time living within a household and relating to his kith and kin. In other words he was in effect on the *'Nivritti marga'* or the path of detachment while all the time he appeared to be simultaneously treading on the *'Pravritti marga'* or the path of involvement.

CHAPTER VII

Mission Accomplished

Om-iti-ekaksharamBrahma vyaharan mam-anusmaran
Yah prayati tyajyan deham sa yati paramam gatim
(He who remembers Me while giving up the gross body,
By uttering the single word, 'Om' attains the exalted position.)

A reputed Persian poet of Kashmir is said to have written a couplet, "*Chu shama manzil-e-ma ba payi ma,*" which when translated means something like this: 'Like a burning candle my destination is at my very feet'. The idea conveyed is that one has not to travel in order to achieve one's goal. The same idea is presented by Acharya Abhinav Gupta in a very lucid way thus: '*Mokhshasya naiva kinchid dhamasti na chapi gamanam-anyatra* – There is no place specified for emancipation to be achieved nor does one need to go anywhere to achieve it'. The reputed Chinese thinker Lao Tzu also conveys the same thought in these lines: 'Without going out of my door I can know all things on earth. Without looking out of my window I can know the ways of heaven. For the further one travels the less one knows. The sage, therefore, arrives without travelling, sees all without looking and does all without doing'. This is precisely true of this great saint of our times, Bhagavaan Ji. He used to remain glued, as it were, to his seat, 'asana'. Initially his seat was blocked by bolsters and pillows from the back and on the right only so that whenever needed he would stretch his legs to his left. Two years prior to his '*Mahanirvana*' he had pillows fixed on the left side also. In front of him were the iron '*Sigdi*', furnace and other items required for keeping the fire aglow in his 'Dhooni' throughout the day and for offering oblations. There was thus no way to stretch his legs to relax or to lie down. This resulted in stiffening of his legs, which in any case were nothing but logs of wood for him. Whenever someone pressed his legs he would say, 'Why press these logs of wood.' He remained confined to his 'Asana' as he could not stand on his legs because of the knee-lock. Perhaps he had taken this vow, which in good old days was the resolve of the Buddha: '*Iha-asane shushyatu me shariram, tvag-asthi-mansam pralayam cha yatu, aprapya bodhim bahukalpa-durlabhaam*

naiva-asanat kaya-manash-chalishyati – While practising penance on this seat here, let my body dry up, let my skin, bones and flesh decay; yet my mind and body would not swerve from the seat without attaining the knowledge, which is difficult to get even in many births and many ages'. At one time he advised a woman saint, Radha Devi also to be confined to one place and seek the Divine within. He is quoted as having said casually that he had grown old, which eventually proved to be an indication that he was preparing to give up his mortal frame and merge permanently with the Divine.

It is not unusual for saints to foresee their end nor is it unusual for many of them to shroud their end in mysteries. Not long ago there was a young saint Prithvi Nath, known popularly as 'Pratha Mo't'. When he left his gross body and his devotees carried his mortal remains to the crematorium, they were astonished to find that he had visited the spot a few hours earlier and selected the pier where he wanted his body to be consigned to flames. He had himself cleaned the place with clay and water and advised the persons there to reserve it for his cremation. When the Hindu devotees and the Muslim followers of Reshi Peer, a great saint of yore, entered into an argument whether to burn or bury his gross body, they found that the box carrying the body was empty except a bunch of flowers in it, which they shared among themselves. In the case of Alakheshwari Roop Bhawani the situation became all the more mysterious. She was at village Vaskur when she sent a devotee of her to her parental house at Safakadal in Srinagar. When the devotee reached the place he was baffled to find that people there were preparing to carry her mortal remains for cremation. He informed them that Bhawani was at Vaskur and he had come all the way from there at her behest and, therefore, there was no question of her having left her body at this place. At his insistence the cloth covering the body was removed and all that was there was just a tuft of her hair. This was the relic preserved in a silver casket at the pilgrimage centre of Vaskur. For Bhagavaan Ji to foretell of his 'Nirvana' was thus in keeping with this tradition of the saints and sages of Kashmir. How seriously his devotees took this casual remark of his about his ageing, is difficult to guess. One thing is certain, however, that no body was prepared to lose him and to be rendered forsaken and forlorn, without his mentor and master to

guide him and provide him shelter. Therefore his leaving the mortal frame was unthinkable for all of them and they wanted his physical presence for many many years more.

There was another indication of the inevitable given by him, which could not be understood at that time. Some time before May 1968 he desired that all his unused items of clothing be taken out and arranged. These included shirts, waistcoats, *'Pheran & Potsh'*(a typicall Kashmiri costume with a detachable lining) and turbans, mostly brought by devotees for their Master to wear. Shri Pran Nath Koul, his loved one took up the job and neatly arranged all these items. It is said that thereafter he started wearing these items, one by one on each day and the only unused item – a white turban – remaining, he used on the last day of his life in this 'Sansara'. Thus he acknowledged the love and affection of his devotees and used even the last item offered by someone as a token of his attachment and devotion towards him.

For such emancipated saints the body is just a vehicle or a tool to carry out their spiritual activities. Once these activities come to fruition and there is no further need for the body they give it up and merge with the Divine. For an ordinary person the need to give up the body is when it decays. '*Vasansi jeernanya yatha vihaya navani grihnati naroparinya, tatha sharirani vihaya jeernanya anyani samyati navani dehi* – An embodied person gives up his body on its having decayed and adopts a new body just as one gives up old clothes when these are torn and wears new ones in their place'. The saints and sages do not wait for the body to decay. They take birth for a purpose in view and to fulfill a mission. Having achieved the goal they are no longer in need of the body and, therefore, give it up. A person has five sheaths, 'Koshas', '*Annamaya-kosha*' or the sheath made of food, '*Pranamaya-kosha*' or the sheath made of breath, '*Manomaya-kosha*' or the sheath of the mind, '*Vijnanamaya-kosha*' or the sheath of the intellect and '*Anandamaya-kosha*' or the sheath of the bliss. Rahula Walpole, the famous Buddhist philosopher of Sri Lanka has described a being as 'a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates. These are matter (*Annamaya Kosha*), sensation (*Pranamaya Kosha*), perception (*Manomaya Kosha*), mental formation (*Vijnanamaya Kosha*) and

consciousness (*Aanandamaya Kosha*)'. Bhagavaan Ji had traversed all these sheaths or aggregates, controlled them and finally transcended them.

He used his physique in travelling extensively in the initial stages to meet saints and visit pilgrimage centers. He used his mind in pondering over the eternal and the immortal. He used his breath for yogic exercises. He used his intellect to fathom the depth and the vastness of the Divine, sift real from unreal and eternal from transient and finally he dwelled in the realm of the eternal bliss up to his last breath in this *'Nashwar sansar'* or the mortal world of birth and death. He was indifferent towards the gross body though, as is clear by the fact that he fasted indefinitely at times, ate ferociously occasionally and cared very little for its upkeep. It was almost a mechanical exercise for him to wash his face, change his dress, tie the turban and apply a 'Tilaka' on his forehead. He was very casual in taking bath or changing his dress. Now one would see his body or parts of it swollen and another moment the swelling was gone. Sometimes the body would appear weak and decayed but the radiance was always there. They say people used to massage his body and would always find it shining and glistening. What is said about 'Agni', the fire in the Vedas, *'Jyotishyam jyotih* – glare and light of the multitude of illuminations' could equally and appropriately be said about the radiance of Bhagvaan Ji's countenance, face and looks. He had a sparkling pair of eyes, a shining forehead and an enchanting radiance, *'Tejas'* – he was a *'Tejawan'* ascetic of highest spiritual state.

Bhagavaan Ji had occasional ailments like fever, obstruction in urination, swelling in the face etc. He would never take any medicine. For him the best medicine was his remaining absorbed with 'Brahman'. Outwardly he would take hot water boiled on his 'Dhooni' or a decoction of Unani medicinal herb called 'Kahzaban'. Perhaps he followed the dictum, *'Sharire jarjari bhute vyadi graste kalevare aushadhi jahnvi toyam vaidyo Narayano Hari* – When the gross body decays or is full of ailments, consider the holy water of the Ganges as the medicine and Narayana as the doctor'. He would also store balls of cannabis, prepared with a special technique in his presence perhaps intoxicant elements removed and use these with usual tobacco in his 'chillum'. Once after many days of fasting,

when he was asked to take food, he retorted that he was getting enough nourishment from his 'Chillum'. It is reported that during the last two years of his life on this planet he stopped this consumption of cannabis balls also. Towards the last days he would not listen to music even, which otherwise he was very fond of. He became so much detached that he wanted his lifelong companion 'Dhooni' also to be done away with. However, it was continued at the insistence of his disciples. This clearly showed that one by one he was bidding goodbye to all those things, which had become part of his existence and was putting a full stop to all his routine activities. He was withdrawing from exterior and concentrating on his interior *'Chit'*, the Consciousness in the form of pure awareness, free of all conditioning and without any object and devoid of all forms of duality.

The fateful day of Jyeshta Shukla Dvitiya corresponding to 28th May 1968 arrived. It started as usual and Bhagavaan Ji had his usual routine. There was nothing abnormal or unusual about it and no indication of any major event going to take place. Some people came for his darshan throughout the day and got his blessings and prashada of the holy ash. In the afternoon some three Sadhus came and got the customary *'Dakhshina'* of Rupee one each. He puffed at his *'Chillum'*. A devotee made some tea for him but he declined to have it. Then he drank a glassful of sugar-mixed water. A lady devotee wanted to have *'Prashada'* from him. She refused to budge an inch until and unless she received it from him and not from any one else. At the end he did oblige her by taking out some dry fruits from his pocket and gave it to her. Finally the time came and at 5.45 p.m. he uttered the *'Shad-akhshar' Maha mantra* of *'Om Namah Shivaya'* and closed his eyes forever. This was in keeping with what the Lord has said in the Gita, "*Om iti-ekaksharam Brahma vyaharan mam-anusmaran, yah prayati tyejan deham sa yati paramam gatim* – He who remembers me by uttering the single word 'Om' while giving up the gross body certainly attains the exalted spiritual position". Uttering these immortal words with the last breath was very significant. It sheds light on his entire life and sums up his message. All along he had attached a lot of importance to the seed syllable 'Om'. He used to call it the throat of godhead. Om is the crux of both *Nigamas* or the Vedas and *Agamas* or other scriptures. It represents the Absolute God, its Energy and the resultant

manifestation in the form of the creation. Shiva is the Divine in his attribute-less and formless state, attaining whom is the high point of spiritual seeking. When we pay obeisance to Him by saying *'Namah'* we recognize the limitless 'I' being sought after by the limited 'I'. After all the spiritual *'Sadhana'* is nothing but a journey from this limited 'I' circumscribed by time and space to the limitless 'I' transcending all the barriers of time and space. By uttering these words while giving up the mortal coil he gave a clear indication that he had accomplished the highest point of *'sadhana'* and was one with *'Param Shiva'*.

After a doctor confirmed the death of the mortal frame, the news was made public. Mourners came to the place in large numbers and some of them poured spoonful of water into his mouth. Although the devotees did not find it necessary, yet at the instance of the near relatives Triloki Nath Kachroo son of Smt. Janaki Devi and Pushkar Nath Kaul son of Chanda Ji (grand son of Smt.Devki Devi) performed the customary kriya on the first day. The kriya having been performed, the mortal remains were carried in a regal way with devotion and reverence at noon on the following day to the crematorium at Karan Nagar. Thousands of devotees of all religious faiths followed the cortege. This crematorium is situated on the bank of the rivulet, Doodh Ganga, in the close proximity of the shrine of 'Turushkaraza Bhairav', where Bhagavaan ji used to go for meditation so often. Bhajans were sung, stotras were recited and sacred mantras were chanted while the mortal remains were consigned to the flames. Thus the individual soul merged with the Universal soul, the five elements of the individual being joined the limitless store of elements in this vast universe. By the nightfall everything was over. The yearlong rituals were, however, entrusted to Jawahir Lal Malla son of Smt. Kamla Ji and grandson of Smt. Devki Devi. The holy ashes were immersed partly at the Sangam at Shadipur, the confluence of Sindhu and Vitasta as is customary in Kashmir. This spot is held in the same reverence by Kashmiri Pandits as the Sangam at Allahabad by all the Hindus. The remaining portion of ashes was consigned to the Ganges at Hardwar after a few months.

Bhagavaan Ji might have ceased to exist in his embodied form but he lives in his astral form even today. A distinction has to be

made between *'Kshetra'* or the body and *'Kshetrajna'* or the knower of the body, the terminology used in the Gita. As *'Kshetra'* he may not exist today but as *'Kshetrajna'* he continues to be there. He lives in the hearts of those who loved and adored him. He lives in the memories of those who were relieved of their suffering by him. He lives in the gratitude of those who consider themselves indebted to him for one reason or the other. He lives in the spirit of those who were guided by him in their spiritual quest. He lives in the gatherings where hymns in his praise are sung, where oblations in his name are offered into the holy fire and where the soul-satisfying 'Mantra' of *'Om Namo Bhagavate Gopinathaya'* is chanted with dedication and devotion. He lives in the captivating gaze emanating from his resplendent eyes in the photographs and statues. He lives in the unspoken words that appear to sprout forth from the half-open lips of the statues and portraits placed on pedestals in the Ashrams at different places. He lives in the dreams, thoughts and feelings of his devotees, admirers and beloveds. He had come to this world with a purpose and the purpose was first to complete his own spiritual journey and then to serve the humanity both in mundane and spiritual matters. He accomplished the first purpose by bringing his sadhana to fruition and realizing Self and the Divine. He fulfilled the second purpose by coming to the aid of the suffering and deserving and by guiding the aspirants in their spiritual quest. From all accounts given by various people within the country and abroad he continues to fulfill his mission in his astral form. People have seen him in their dreams, perceived him in human form and seen a glimpse of this great soul in their imagination. This has established his oft-quoted utterance, *'Amar chha maran* – How can death come to an immortal.'

Even otherwise there is no death, certainly not for such emancipated souls. The Gita says, *'Na jayate mriyate va kadachit, nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah, ajo nityah shashvato'yam purano na hanyate hanyamane sharire* – For the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor, having once been, does he ever cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, everexisting, undying and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain'. Bhagavaan Ji was with us, is with us and shall remain with us in future as well. In the words of Lal Ded, *'Asi aesy tai aesi aasav asi dore kaer patavath. Shivas sori na zyon ta marun ravas sori na atagath* – We only were in the past and we only shall be in

future. We only have been coming and going. Shiva shall never cease to appear and hide as the Sun shall not cease to rise and set'. This is again what the Gita says, '*Na tvevaham jatu nasam na tvam name janadhipah, n chaiva na bhavishyamah sarve vayamatah param* – Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings. Nor in the future shall any of us cease to be'. Let us, therefore, rejoice in his company and enjoy his astral presence. We shall find him provided we have a clear vision, a discerning eye.

It is not necessary for saints of such spiritual stature as that of Bhagavaan Ji to remain embodied in order to help and guide people. His unseen '*Varada-hasta*' or the boon-giving hand is always there to come to our rescue and help. His unseen '*Abhay-hasta*' or the hand warding off fear is always in front of us to enable us perform our duties dauntlessly. He is always present to guide us and steer our boat in the proper direction. He had come to awaken us, to unite the humanity, to raise us from animality to divinity and to spread the message of peace, piety and purity. It is up to us to fulfill this part of his mission. The Trusts, the Foundations, the Satsang Mandals and the Societies established in his name have the bounden duty to make this happen. The members associated with these organizations and all the devotees spread in various parts of the world should strive to imbibe these qualities fully and to convey the message in every nook and corner. There are two important aspects of Bhagavaan Ji's mission, which we have to implement. The first is the '*Sadhana*' or the spiritual seeking. Although it is an individual activity yet the necessary inspiration can come from these organizations. A congenial and conducive atmosphere has to be created so that every single devotee strives to know the truth and attain the Supreme Universal Consciousness. '*Sadhana*' is not an activity for which a specified time in a day can be earmarked. It is an activity that has to be carried out all the time. Whatever we think, we utter or do should be a part of our 'Sadhana'. It should become our natural habit and habitual nature to undertake it all the time. Every breath inhaled and exhaled should be conditioned with the Divine name as stated by Parmananda. '*Doi Prana den ta raath danda jurya vaiy Omke kuru zora timanaey laiy* – The inhale and exhale are the pair of Oxen yoked to till the land and you have to control them with the stick of the word Om.'

The second aspect of his mission is the alleviation of the suffering of those in trouble and pain and to render help to the deprived and the needy. This is a collective social obligation of all the devotees of this great saint. Many philanthropic activities are being undertaken by some of them, yet much more needs to be done. In fact it is a continuing programme and must form an essential item of the long term planning of these organizations and forums. Financial help to the poor in the fields of education and health, character building among the youth, inculcating the values of morality and ethics among all sections and creating awareness of the need for righteousness, truth and duty are some of the more important activities that Bab Maharaj would like us to undertake. As has been stated elsewhere, when he was requested to come to the rescue of '*Battas*', the Pandits he is said to have lamented that there is no '*Batta*', (literally the noble one). Let us reform and remodel our society so that every one of us is a '*Batta*' in the real sense of the term. We must justify both the titles by which we are known, 'Pandit' meaning a learned one and 'Batta' meaning a noble and exalted one. In the hay days of Sanskrit language a King was addressed as 'Bhatta' and a queen as 'Bhattini'. Bhagavaan Ji will not only be pleased to see this transformation of the society but shall also certainly come to our help in his benign astral form in achieving this desirable change.

It is not for nothing that we address him as Bhagavaan. There are many appellations by which we could call him, 'Sannyasi', 'Yogi', 'Swami', 'Baba', 'Sadhu' but we prefer to call him Bab Bhagavaan. There is a tradition in these epithets. Saints like Rama Krishna, Aurobindo and Raman Maharshi are addressed as Shri. Saints like Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda, and Shivananda are given the title of Swami. Some saints are called Maharshis and some simply Gurudeva. For us our Master is 'Bhagavaan', which means exalted and holy one. He is omnipresent and omniscient and he explains to us the meaning of being and points the way towards realization of the self. It is for us to benefit from his omnipresence in whatever way we like, be it for mundane needs or for spiritual uplift. For us he is our 'Bab', the father, who keeps an eye on us and guides us all the time.

CHAPTER VIII

Words of Wisdom

Aano bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah

(Let the noble words of wisdom come to us from all sides.)

Bhagavaan Ji was not communicative. He spoke very little and that too mostly indirectly. It is well said, *'Panditah mitta bhashinah* – the knowledgeable are men of very few words.' Even then a few pithy utterances have escaped his lips at different times, which the intelligent devotees were quick to record and remember. Some of these are explained below in detail:

Syezar, Pazar ta Shozar: - Bhagavaan Gopi Nath has summed up the desirable qualities of an ideal person in three crisp Kashmiri words, 'Syezar' 'Pazar' and 'Shozar'. Translated loosely in English, these would mean Rectitude, Truthfulness and Purity. Sri Krishna, while enumerating *'Daivi Sampada'* or the divine qualities in Chapter XVI of the Gita has listed more than two dozen items, which include these three items also, viz; *'Arjavam'* – straight-forwardness, *'Satyam'* –truth and *'Sattva sanshuddhih'* – purity of heart. Bhagavaan Ji has chosen these three items only either because he considered other qualities as subservient to these and, therefore, of secondary importance or he was of the view that all the other qualities prescribed in the Gita were inherent in these three primary characteristics in one-way or the other. It would be of immense help to us in our mundane and spiritual uplift if these three qualities are analysed, explained and elaborated so that it is easier for us to imbibe these divine qualities in our lives.

Take for example *'Sezar'*, straight-forwardness or rectitude. This quality shapes our moral character, guides our behaviour and helps us shun all the artificiality, ostentation and falsehood. We are thus able to present ourselves in our pristine purity and true colour. Crookedness gone from our character we not only think right, speak right and act right but also pray to the Lord all the time to keep our intentions clean and beneficial for all, *'Tan-me manah shiva sankalpam-astu* – Let my mind be of noble resolve.' We Indians have inherited a civilisation, a culture and a thinking, wherein the entire world is

treated as one family, *'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam'*; and prayers are offered for the well being of he whole creation, *'Sarve bhavantu sukhenah'*. That being so, there is no reason for us to be crooked, there is no room for artificiality and there is no need for putting on any mask. Straight-forwardness in behaviour will give us satisfaction and endear us to all we deal with. It will infuse confidence in us, in what we do and we shall be able to execute all our deeds with dexterity, excellence and aplomb. In short this one single quality of *'Sezar'* or straight-forwardness shall turn us into true yogis.

As for the second quality of *'Pazar'*, the Truth, let us first examine what it actually means. *'Sat'* means a reality or existence in Sanskrit. The concept of reality or existence is *'Satya'* or the Truth. We are told that the unreal has no existence and the real never ceases to exist. *'Na-asato vidyate bhavo na-abhavo vidyate satah.* B.G.II.16.' Unreal is a mirage that attracts but deceives. Unreal is a temptation that may give momentary pleasure but eventually leads to a dead end and pushes into an abyss. Reality or the Truth is the only saviour that can steer the boat of our life safe in the ocean of the 'Samsara'. The Vedic prayer, *'Asato ma sat-gamaya* – lead me from falsehood to truth' is, therefore, very significant and relevant at the physical, mental and spiritual – all the three planes. According to the Bhagawad Gita, 'Sat' has three different connotations. *'Sad-bhave sadhu bhave cha sad-iti-etat-prayujyate. Prashaste karmani tatha sach-chhabdah Partha yujyate.* B.G.XVII.26'. First connotation is reality, which means that Ultimate Truth, the pursuit of which should be the primary aim of our lives. That could be defined as 'Self realisation' or 'Realisation of the Divine.' The second meaning is goodness, which means all that is beneficial, utilitarian and uplifting for one and all. The third purport is auspicious act, which means all those actions that are not only for name and fame but also for the welfare of self and others, *'Swantah Sukhaya* and *Sarvantah Sukhaya* – for the pleasure of the self as also of every one else. In the Buddhist terminology it is *'Bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya'* or for the good and pleasure of a large number of people. There is no escape from the truth. Sooner or later we have to accept it, face it and adopt it. The Upanishad has proclaimed and we have adopted it as our national dictum, *'Satyam-eva jayate* – Truth alone triumphs.' It has, therefore, rightly been enjoined upon us that we

must tread upon the path of truth and righteousness. No wonder, in his translation of the Gita, Mr. Juan Mascaro has translated the term *'Dharma'* as the truth. He has quoted Tagore as having translated the term in this very manner. The truth should not only be our motto but it should also be our nature, our habit and our duty.

The third quality of *'Shozar'*, or the purity is again very significant. It should be our endeavour to be pure in thought, word and deed. In good old days, the marble sculptors in Italy sometimes filled wax in the portions of their sculpture, which they would accidentally chip off, in order to present these pieces of art in their proper shape. Lest they got cheated, the prospective customers would ask whether these were 'sans wax.' Thus was born the English word 'Sincere' meaning without wax or without deceit. Like those marble figures we should be sincere, without wax, free from any impurity. Our purity should be the purity of gold, which comes out unscathed from out of the fire and stands the test of the touchstone. A pure person has nothing to hide nothing to fear and presents himself in his true colour. He deceives neither himself nor others. This quality of purity makes him what the Gita calls *'Sthita prajna'* or the steadfast. Purity is one of the traits that endear a devotee to the Lord. Sri Krishna says,' *Anapekshah shuchir dakshah.... Yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah*. A person without any expectation who is pure and efficient and devoted to Me is also dear to Me. B.G. XII.16.' It should be our endeavour, therefore, to be pure and maintain purity of the body by bathing and cleaning, of the mind by entertaining noble thoughts, *'Aa no bhadra kratavo yantu vishvatah* – let noble thoughts come to us from all sides' and of the soul and spirit by spiritual cleansing. The three qualities collectively give us what has been described in the Gita as *'Brahmi sthiti'* or the Brahman-state. On attaining that state there is no bewilderment or 'Moha' and this state leads to merger with the Divine, *'Brahma-nirvanam* – B.G. II.72.'

A human being comprises five different sheaths together forming three distinct bodies. The food-formed sheath or the *'Annamaya kosha'* is called *'Sthoola sharira'* or the gross body of flesh and blood. This body needs to be kept fit and healthy for the very survival, as this body is the vehicle of and the foundation for all

our activities. It has, therefore, to be maintained clean and upright. So the two qualities of "*Sezar*' and '*Shozar*' have to be applied to this visible body. The air, mind and intellect-formed sheaths or the '*Pranamaya*', '*Manomaya*' and '*Vijnanamaya*' *koshas* together form the '*Sookshma sharira*' or the subtle body. This is also called '*Linga sharira*' or the symbolic body. This body needs all the three qualities, rectitude, purity and truth in order to keep it fit and healthy. Apart from the mental rectitude and clarity we have to have intellectual purity. In addition, a truthful mental framework and a sincere intellectual set up give lustre and shine to our existence. This is called '*Tejas*' or Radiance. All the three qualities of 'sezar', 'pazar' and 'shozar' are required for this hidden but vital body. Lastly we have the bliss-formed sheath or the '*Anadamaya kosha*', which makes the '*Karana Deha*' or the inner coating. This is very subtle and difficult to perceive aspect of human existence and this also needs all the three qualities for its spiritual health. Without these qualities there will be no knowledge of the innermost facet of our being, no perception of the Truth, we seek to realise and no experience of the Supreme Bliss, we aim to achieve. We are told that the Divine is the embodiment of '*Sat*', '*Chit*' and '*Ananda*', Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. In order to merge with the Divine and attain the absolute position of Universal 'I'ness, and experience the embodiment of these three attributes, the quid pro quo is to imbibe and adopt all the three qualities as enjoined upon by Bhagavaan Ji.

Bhagavaan Gopi Nath has prescribed a straight path for our spiritual advancement by asking us to take this three-lane road of S.P.S. The path is no doubt straight but by no means easy. The mind being what it is and given the human failings, it is very difficult to put into practice these three golden words. Even Arjuna expressed his helplessness in controlling the mind which he described as 'turbulent, strong and obstinate – *Chanchalam hi manah Krishna, pramathi balavad-dridam*. B.G.VI.34.' Even so it is not impossible to control it provided we 'practise constantly and remain detached at all times – *Abhyasena tu Kaunteya vairagyena cha grihyate*, B.G.VI.35'. Coming to think of it, in the end analysis these three qualities are one and the same and, therefore, inseparable. One cannot be truthful without being straightforward. One cannot be pure without being truthful and one cannot be straightforward without being pure.

Rectitude, truth and purity go together and may perhaps be the same feature viewed from different angles.

The Gita says, *"uddhared-atmana-atmanam na-atmanam avasadayet. Atmaiva atmana bandhuh atmaiva ripur-atmana,* Let a person raise himself by his own self, let him not debase himself. For he is himself his own friend, himself his own foe.B.G.VI.5' Keeping in view these words of the Lord, Bhagavaan Ji wants us to be our own friends and raise ourselves in stature. For this purpose only he has prescribed these three qualities to be adopted so that our development and advancement are assured. May be he believed that once we cultivate these we shall become deserving recipients of the Divine grace, which will help our efforts bear fruit. Blessed are those who have had personal interaction and direct spiritual contact with him during his life time, and have had the opportunity of listening to these golden words from his lotus mouth, *'Mukharvinda'*. Blessed are we all for whom Bhagavaan Ji has left these golden words to be assimilated and implemented. Our unflinching faith in him and in all that he has said will stand us in good stead throughout our lives. This will transform our lives, guide us on the right path and lead us to our cherished sacred destination. These pronouncements of Bhagavaan Gopi Nath sound very simple but are deep in their meaning and purport. They are like pearls inside the seashells. It will be to our advantage if we break open the shell and recognise the hidden pearls. An ocean of message is hidden in these three golden words. If we realise their significance we shall know how precious and priceless they are.

Amar Chha Maran: - What does this remark mean? Is it not obvious that what is immortal cannot die? Then what was the great saint trying to convey by making this remark to a devotee of his? One does not need an extra ordinary wisdom or an above average prudence to understand that only mortals meet with death and not the immortals. One does, however, need knowledge, wisdom and understanding to figure out what is mortal and what is immortal. We have to sift grain from the chaff. The Bhagawad Gita is full of assertions about the immortality of the soul in almost every chapter. It says, *'Na Jayate mriyate va kadachit, nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah. Ajo nityah shashvato-ayam purano, na hanyate hanyamane sharire.* The soul is neither born nor does it die. It does

not come into being and then cease to be. It is unborn, eternal, constant and ancient. It does not get killed when the body gets slain. B.G. II.20' The indestructibility of the soul has been brought out very lucidly in this shloka, *'Na-enam chhindanti shastrani na-enam dahati pavakah. Na cha-enam kledayanti-aapah na shoshayati marutah.* Weapons do not cleave the soul, fire does not burn it, water does not wet it nor does wind dry it. B.G.II.23' Obviously it was the immortal soul that the Bhagavaan Ji was referring to while making this remark. What about the other elements, the body, the mind and the intellect, which together with the soul constitute a being, the 'Jeeva'? The great Lal Ded has proclaimed, *'Asi aes tai asi aasav, asi dore kaer patavath. Shivas sori na zyon ta marun ravas sori na atagath* - Only we, there were in the past, only we, there will be in the future. It is we who have been in this cycle of coming and going from time immemorial. The Divine in us, the Shiva, will never cease to come out of this cycle of birth and death just as the Sun will never cease to rise and set.'

Was it this 'we' of Lal Ded that Bhagavaan Ji had in mind when he said that the immortal does not die? Did he mean to convey that we all are immortal? In order to figure this out we must try to understand what is meant by this 'we' or 'I', the 'Jeeva' and whether this Jeeva is immortal. What is, after all, the Jeeva or the embodied soul? It comprises the *'Sthoola Sharira'* or the gross body, the *'Sookshma Sharira'* or the subtle body and the *'Karana Deha'* or the inner coating, the causal body. While the gross body comprises flesh and blood, the subtle comprises breath, mind and intellect the causal body is primitive ignorance, devoid of consciousness. This body gets destroyed when the knowledge dawns of the real self and the true essence. The question that arises is whether the Jeeva is immortal in its totality or only partially in one or more of its aspects. Jeeva is said to be consciousness defined by the principles constituting individuality. It is the embodied being limited to the psychophysical states. Doership and enjoyership are inseparable from the consciousness of duality. Jeeva is eternal since its individuality is never destroyed in the births and deaths it undergoes. It is non-eternal, as it is transfigured in the realization of Brahman. When its limiting conditions are withdrawn, the Jeeva turns back to its source. To identify the immortal we have to understand the nature of 'Jeeva'. It is apparent that *'Jeeva'*, the being,

'Jagat', the world and 'Ishwara', the Divine go together and, therefore, we need to know their relationship, per se. If the relationship of 'Jeeva' and 'Jagat' on the one hand and 'Ishwara' on the other is that of the creation and the creator then their properties can be different. If, however, their relationship is that of manifestation and the one manifested, then their properties can be identical or same.

Our intellect fails to fathom this complicated riddle because our approach is through reasoning and logic. Swami Krishnananda has observed that 'logic is a proud child of duelist prejudice'. If God alone is this entire world no body can comprehend the relationship between Him and the world. It is only a *'Siddha Purusha'*, an emancipated soul like Bhagavaan Ji, who can perceive the reality and proclaim with authority that He is immortal, His manifestation is immortal and that there is nothing like death for no one dies. Science also believes that matter is indestructible. It can change its form but can neither be created nor destroyed. Even our ordinary observation shows us that everything here verily is cyclic – without a beginning and without an end. The riddle whether an egg came first or the chick came first remains unsolved in spite of tremendous advancement in Science. It is, therefore, well said that the Science makes a great contribution for our small needs and Spirituality caters to the requirement of our prime needs.

Bhagavaan Ji is perhaps trying to tell us that we are all immortal and, therefore should not fear death. The Vedas have also given a clarion call to us, *'Amritasya putrah*- O Ye, children of the immortality.' We have to recognize the immortal in us. After all, the Lord has said, *'Ishwarah sarva-bhutanam hrid-deshe tishthati*. The Divine dwells in the hearts of all beings. B.G.XVIII.61' Swami Shivananda has this to say: "The self of every one bears testimony to the existence of the self, which comprehends the entire universe. The Universal self is God. Though one is encased in this finite body, one can think and feel, 'I am infinite." This infinite in us is Truth, Ethics and Aesthetics or *'Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram.'* It is Being, Consciousness and Bliss or *'Sat, Chit* and *Ananda.'* One might ask why then can't we perceive and recognize our immortality. This query can be answered in two ways. First: The Jeeva or the individual soul has all the faculties of the Brahman, the Universal

Soul. It can create, sustain, destroy, conceal and favour (*Srishti, Sthiti, Samhara, Pidana* and *Anugraha*). It has all the three powers of knowledge, desire and action (*Jnana, Ichha,* and *Kriya shakti*). But all these faculties in his case are circumscribed by limitations of time, space and quantum. The same faculties and powers in the Divine are unlimited. It is these limitations that limit our vision. The source of our knowledge is only '*Pratyaksha*' or the direct perception. Therefore we are unable to see beyond the gross body. If we take recourse to other sources of knowledge, i.e. reason, analogy, scriptural testimony and intuition we will be able to see our existence in its totality, perceive our true self and then realize the significance of the remark made by Bhagavaan Ji. His was a realized soul wherein the limited 'I' and the limitless 'I' had got merged. No wonder, therefore, he was seeing clearly the immortality of every being, universality and indestructibility of the soul and omnipresence and eternality of the Divine.

There is evidence galore in the scriptures that establishes oneness of '*Jeeva*' and '*Brahman*'. It has been clarified at places that even though the '*Brahman*' pervades this universe yet it transcends it. The Veda says, '*Tat tvam asi.* – That art Thou'. '*Aham Brahma-asmi.* I am the Divine'. '*Ekam-eva-advitiyam.* There is only one who is unique'. In other words it denotes merger and oneness of the subject and the object. The 'Purusha Sukta' says, '*Purusha-eva-idam sarvam...ati tishthat dashangulam.* – Everything here is God who stays higher by ten measures'. Ishavasya Upanishad states: ' *Ishavasyam-idam sarvam yat kinchit jagatyam jagat.* – All this that is seen in this world is pervaded by the Divine'. The Shaiva Acharyas of Kashmir have said, '*Vishvatmikam tat-uttirnam.* The Divine is manifested as the universe but stays above it'. Sufis also have repeatedly proclaimed, '*Anal-Haq.* I am the Supreme Truth'. Salvation, which is the aim of every seeker, is thought of in terms of the relationship of the soul to the Absolute Reality or God. Bhagavaan Ji saw everything as immortal for he himself is immortal.

<u>*'Ahankaras namaskar, sui gav Omkar, tami saet bani sakshatkar'*</u>: This is a very important spiritual statement made by Bhagavaan Ji. The purport of this statement is that we must realize self and get absorbed in 'I-ness' for the self itself is Omkara, the universal self and by contemplating on Omkara we are able to realize the Divine

and get a glimpse of the 'Brahman'. It has been stated elsewhere that he had in his own hand written 'Om' in Sharada script at two places, with Rama written all over on one and Shiva on the other. There he has conveyed an important message that in the seed syllable 'Om' are hidden both Shiva and Vishnu, the deities of Shaiviites and Vaishnaviites. By propitiating 'Om' we are thus in effect propitiating the Supreme Divine. This statement gives due importance to 'Om', which connotes in totality the Creator, the Creation and their mutual relationship. The Lord says in the Gita, '*Pranavah sarva Vedeshu* – I am the 'Om' in all the Vedas'. No wonder, therefore, our Bab has said that by meditating on 'Om' we shall be able to have a glimpse of the Brahman. Our scriptures say, "Think of yourself as a piece of wood and the word 'Om' as another. Rub the two pieces together till they blaze in the incandescent glory of the Supreme." This is the real purport of the remark made by the sage.

'Yi chhu kitab paran, tor chha gash': This remark was made by him to one of his favourite disciple who was seriously studying some spiritual books. In this remark he has made a point that mere bookish knowledge does not bring light to an aspirant. He has emphasized that experienced truth is the real source of light and not the one learnt by reading literature. That does not mean one should not study scriptures. After all the Upanishad says, '*Swadya-pravachanabhyam ma pramaditavyam* – one should shirk neither from self-study nor from imparting knowledge to others'. What is sought to be conveyed is that whatever one studies should be matched by practice and realization. Even in modern scientific terminology theory is meaningless unless it is applied. Scientific knowledge is applied in technology and then only its benefits accrue to the mankind. In the realm of the spirituality no light can be seen merely by reading books. *Jnana* is incomplete without *Vijnana* or *kriya*. When *Jnana* is matched by *Vijnana* nothing is left as per the Gita, '*Jnanam te'ham sa-vijnanam idam vakhshyami asheshyatah* – I shall give you knowledge as also its application so that nothing remains to be known'. He has rightly laid emphasis on application, experience and realization and not on superficial bookish knowledge. Study sharpens our faculty of logic and reasoning but it does not give us a feel of the reality. In other words it does not give us light. So if the aim is enlightenment, there is no escape from '*Vichara*' or

contemplative introspection and *'Anubhava'* or experience.

'Mehnat pananya ta Guru kripa' : Bhagavaan Ji has said that two things are required to achieve the exalted spiritual position, own hard work and the grace of the preceptor. The grace of the preceptor inspires and instigates us to take to the path of spiritualism. Thereafter it guides us in our endeavour and the quest for the truth. But we have to supplement it by our sustained effort and sustain it with our perseverance and constant effort. After all, the preceptor will show the way but the path is to be traversed by us ourselves. A well-meaning person approached a saint once and wanted to know how to control one's mind. The saint gave him a rather curt reply, 'Whose mind is it that you want to control; it is your own mind, go and control it. Why are you asking me?' It is the same with *'Sadhana'* or the spiritual quest. It is our baby and we have to put in our effort in it. Once we show our eagerness, perseverance and sincerity, the grace of the preceptor will follow. He will show us the path best suited to our genius, he will guide us on this path, he will forewarn about the pitfalls and he will help us overcome the hindrances and difficulties. But we have to put in our effort, we have to experience and we have to toil in order to achieve the desired. The grace of the preceptor works in another way also. It ensures that the effort put in by us bears fruit and we are successful in achieving our goal. The preceptor puts oblation in the form of initiation and guidance in the burning fire of *'Sadhana'* of his disciple and thus performs a never-ending *'Agnihotra'* of spiritual *'Deekhsha'*.

'Yi gav taf parun, yi gav veeri shihilis tal pakun' : This remark has been made with reference to the practice of worshipping God with form. Aspirants worship the Divine either with form or without form. This depends on the personal preference, spiritual level and the stage of a *'sadhaka'*. Bhagavaan ji was not opposed to worshipping the Divine with form but considered it inferior to worship of the formless Divine. According to him this was giving importance to the circumference and ignoring the pivot or worshipping the superficial instead of the essence. He put *'Vichara'* or introspection much above other forms of spiritual practice. He was a votary of intellectual experience, *'Jnana'* or contemplated knowledge and perceived truth like the Vaidic *'Mantra-drashta'*

Rishi. He advised us not to go after mirages but to cling to the truth. Shadows and images, according to him are deceptive. We must try to hold on to the reality and avoid hankering after any falsehood. This remark also connotes that there is no short cut to spiritual achievements, one cannot walk under the shade. One has to go through the rigorous efforts and then alone success is ensured.

Yi gatshi yatshun: This remark was made by Bab when music was going on in his room and the singer sang a line which said that a seeker must join his mind and breath with his preceptor. The spontaneous remark made by him was that this must happen with the grace of God. The message in this remark is far reaching. It is deep as an ocean and vast as the sky. The seeker must first of all combine the thought waves of his mind with those of his preceptor. This way he will come on the same wavelength as that of his Guru and thereby perceive the truth. This needs persistent practice, devotion and dedication. Prana or the breath is the life-essence. Some Scholars link it with the soul because the air is called 'Atmos' from which is derived the word 'Atmosphere' and from 'Atmos', they say we have *'Atma'* in Sanskrit meaning the soul. The seeker joining his breath with that of his preceptor would connote achieving the same spiritual rhythm in yogic exercise as that of his Guru so that his breath, both inhaling and exhaling is attuned to the yogic exercise that leads to the realization of the Divine. But in order to be in a position to achieve this state of mind and breath, says Bhagavaan Ji, His will is needed. This will of the God manifests itself in the form of His grace. Obviously we deserve such a grace either due to our accumulated *'Punya'* of the previous births or the good deeds or *'Sat-karma'* of this birth. While we have now no control over the former, the latter is within our reach provided we are serious about the goal and clear about the aim of our life.

As has been stated elsewhere Bhagavaan Ji did not indulge in sermonizing or giving discourses so that one could record his guidelines verbatim. His devotees who have had the privilege of being close to him and having served him in one way or the other have painstakingly gathered the various pieces of his message to the mankind. These include guidelines for ordinary worldly conduct and precious hints for the spiritual advancement. In the

former category are the following:

- People should combine their efforts and form associations for the service of the poor and the needy. This service will give them lasting peace, happiness and satisfaction. There is an old saying in Persian, *'Tariqat ba juz khidmate khalq nest, ba tasbih-o-sajjad-o- dalq nest* – Virtue does not lie in telling a rosary, donning a long robe or adorning a seat of privilege. It lies only in serving the mankind'.
- A householder should earn his living honestly and spend some of his earning in charity. '*Daana*' or charity is a great virtue prescribed by all sages and scriptures. There is a Shloka in Sanskrit, '*Vidya vivadaya, dhanam madaya, shakti pareshan paripeedanaya, khalasya sadhor-viparitam-etat, jnanaya, danaya cha rakshanaya* – For an evil person, knowledge is for argument, wealth for boasting and strength for troubling others. In the case of virtuous the position is quite the reverse. Knowledge is for enlightenment, wealth for charity and strength for protection'.
- Public money should be handled with the same caution as if one is handling a snake. This is a great lesson in honesty and selfless social service and should stand in good stead to those who are in the field of social work or involved with charitable institutions. Alas if only we pay heed to these wise words, the menace of corruption that is eating into the very vitals of our polity would be eliminated.

For the seekers he had the following advice to give:

- *Saadhana* demands a positive attitude. By this is implied that a seeker must have confidence in himself, faith in his preceptor, belief in his motive and trust in his efforts and perseverance. Any small doubt or any slight wavering will make it difficult for the seeker to pursue his spiritual goal.
- Truth cannot be patented. This is exactly what the Veda says about the Truth, '*Ekam sat viprah bahudhah vadanti* – The truth is one but the wise describe it in different ways'.

Truth is nobody's property and nobody's exclusive monopoly. It can be achieved in different ways, perceived in various ways and described, if at all that is possible, in variety of ways. Nobody has an exclusive right on the Truth as any honest seeker can attain it with the dint of his dogged perseverance. All the great thinkers, philosophers and religious leaders have stated the same truth. Of course their emphasis may have been different in view of the circumstances prevailing, type of audience they had and the requirement of the given time.

- A seeker cannot perceive the reality so long as his attention is elsewhere. How true this statement is. Concentration and focussed attitude in spiritual exercise is a must, without which nothing can be attained. This needs control on senses and sense objects particularly on the mind. This problem of wavering mind was faced by Arjuna as well when he said to the Lord, '*Chanchalam hi manah Krishna pramathi balavad dridham* – O Lord! The mind is very fickle, obstinate and difficult to control'. By constant practice the seeker must put chains on the mind so that it does not waver and undisturbed concentration on the object is ensured.

- The supreme goal of human existence does not come free or easy. By supreme goal he meant self-realization or realization of the Divine. To attain this a seeker has to put in hard labour and deserve the grace of his Guru. Elsewhere also he has laid stress on these two elements for a successful and fruitful '*Saadhana*'. Nothing is achieved unless one puts in concerted effort. As regards the grace of the Guru, the Gita has prescribed three easy means, '*Pranipatena, pariprashnena, sevaya* – surrender, query and service'. Given these pre requisites a seeker is sure to attain the supreme goal of self-realization.

- Whatever the difficulties a seeker may encounter, he must keep on loving God. An accepted fact is that whenever a person embarks on something he is bound to face impediments, hurdles and sometimes severe tests. These

should not deter him from his path and the love of God should be uppermost in his mind. More often than not these hurdles are there to test his sincerity and steadfastness. In fact the love of God will not only give him strength and make his effort fruitful but also help remove these hurdles and pass these tests.

- A true seeker should avoid extra-ordinary gestures in spirituality. This is also an important injunction. Idea is that once a seeker attains some elevated or exalted position in the spiritual realm, he should not lose his head and start behaving like an omnipotent entity. If he does he is in danger of falling from that elevated position and meet with a sad and fierce end. It has happened in his lifetime with a person who attained some height and lost his head. He was warned by him not to indulge in showing off his spiritual powers. He did not listen and met with a sad end.

- Bhagavad Gita is the guiding force and Panchastavi our *'Sadhana'*. This shows that he attached a lot of importance to these two books. And why not, the Gita is the quintessence of all the Upanishads and contains guidelines on all forms of *'Sadhana'*. It has something or the other for every type of seeker, whether a *Karmayogi, a Rajayogi, a Jnana-margi or a Bhakti-margi*. It shows the way to an intellectual, an inquisitive mind, a person who surrenders before God and one who seeks material comforts. Panchastavi, on the other hand, is a text of great *'Sadhana'* seeking the grace of *'Shakti'*, the energy aspect of the Divine. It is said that the five chapters of this text are so effective that if a seeker contemplates and concentrates on any one hymn contained therein he is able to get *'Sahaj Samadhi'* or merger with the Divine without much effort.

- By enlightening one another devotees remain ever contented. The idea perhaps is that the devotees should help each other in overcoming hurdles in their *'Sadhana'*. They should exchange notes on their individual

experiences in spiritual experimentation. This will enable devotees to progress spiritually and also enable those who lag behind to keep pace with their co-devotees in their spiritual advancement. Obviously this mutual enlightenment will be satisfying and will give solace and contentment to everyone of them. The Gita also says that the characteristics of the devotees are that they always talk to each other about God, think about God, sing in His praise and act for Him.

In addition to the guidelines mentioned above there are two more directives that he has given, which are equally applicable in worldly conduct and the spiritual exercises. These are as under;

- Avoid going with the tide; if the cause so demands, stand like a rock for the sake of righteousness. Bhagavaan Ji would not like us to compromise where principles are involved. He wants us to be firm as a rock on the side of righteousness, truth and piety. This is our 'Dharma' or sacred duty to uphold the cause of 'Dharma' or righteousness. It is rightly said, '*Dharmo rakshati rakshitah* – righteousness protects us only if we protect it'.

- Persons of indiscipline get cursed before they get corrected. Discipline is a great virtue in all spheres of our activities. Indiscipline leads to chaos and confusion. It upsets the applecart whether the activity relates to mundane field or the spiritual one. Therefore it is desirable for us as ordinary individuals or as seekers in quest of the Supreme reality, to be disciplined, law-abiding and obedient as the situation demands. That will lead to harmony, peace, prosperity and progress. We are doomed and cursed to suffer in case we are in-disciplined and show scant regard for the established norms.

CHAPTER IX

For the Good of the Mankind

Tesham nityabhiyukhtanam yogakshemam vahamyaham
(To those that remain constantly attached to Me
I give what they need and secure what they have.)

Saints and sages are born on this planet for the good of the mankind at large. They not only ensure victory of virtue over vice and establishment of '*Dharma*' or righteousness, but they also come to the rescue of people by removing their suffering and giving spiritual guidance to the aspirants so that the divinity in them manifests in all their thoughts, words and deeds. They do it in a number of ways. Some undertake a strenuous itinerary in the length and breadth of the country to preach '*Dharma*' by giving discourses, answering queries and explaining the tenets of various spiritual disciplines. Some save humanity from calamities and disaster by their spiritual powers and the control over elements of the nature. Some inspire people to serve humanity by adopting villages, clusters and hutments where the poor and the needy dwell. There are some who lead sessions of singing hymns in praise of God, thereby creating conditions and environment conducive to living a life of piety and truthfulness. All this is no doubt for the good of the mankind.

Kashmir has had a tradition of different kind. Here we have had saints confined to their homes and dwelling places, giving audience to people, listening to their woes and tales of suffering, providing solace and redress to their troubles and tribulations. Simultaneously they also select deserving seekers, '*Patra*' for spiritual initiation and help them achieve the exalted position. It is said that giving lessons, '*vidya*' to a foolish person is as useless as putting oblations in the burnt fire that has turned into ashes, '*Hutah bhasmani havin-cha moorkhe danam ashashwatam*'. The great Lal Ded also has said, '*Moodhas jnanach kath no vaenze* – Do not divulge the secrets of knowledge to a foolish person'. So, per necessity these saints had to be selective in choosing their disciples as recipients of their knowledge. Bhagavaan Ji was one such saint who spent seventy years of his earthly life in a similar way for the good of a

multitude of people. Even after his *'Nirvana'* in 1968 he continues to help, guide and inspire the lucky chosen few, who deserve this favour.

On the mundane level he is reported to have served the common man *'Janata Janardhan'* in a variety of ways. Many people suffering from dreaded diseases and ailments have approached him during his lifetime. To some he gave a pinch of holy ash from his 'Dhooni'. To some he gave a little candy or some other item of *'Prashada'* brought by a devotee. Some received a little *'Charanamrita'* or holy water from him. Some got a touch of his pincer or the tong used in his daily sacrificial fire, *'Nityá-agnihotra'*. This did the trick and the affected were relieved of their diseases. In some cases he wished away the ailment of a devotee or his kin as soon as it was reported to him and next moment the illness was gone forever. If a patient with heart ailment came to him he would feel the pulse on his own two wrists or advise him to have an oil massage and he would get cured. Sometimes he would take upon himself the ailment of his devotee till it was cured. A similar story is narrated about Satya Sai Baba. It is said that once he complained of some pain in his abdomen, which was diagnosed as appendicitis. The doctors went away and were back in a short time with instruments to perform an operation on the spot. On their return they found Baba in perfect health and he directed them to a poor man's hut nearby where the actual patient was waiting to be operated. Baba had temporarily taken the ailment upon himself so that the doctors made necessary arrangement for the surgery, which otherwise they may not have done.

It is also reported that Bhagavaan Ji sometimes even suggested a cure for a devotee's illness. He advised a patient suffering from stomach ulcer to take rice with a dish of split gram and he was cured. Another patient having a throat trouble was asked to give fomentation with brick pieces heated in the Sun and this proved to be the cure for his problem. He gave small packet of ashes from his 'Dhooni' to Chuni Lal, Vice Principal of a Music Institute in Srinagar for his wife who was diagnosed as suffering from leukaemia to be given to her with water or medicine. His mother administered the ashes and also smeared these on her body. That night and on the following day she felt very hungry and was given milk and some

other feed. Later when the doctors checked her they were amazed to see that there was no trace of the blood cancer as diagnosed earlier. Another lady had a kidney infection. Fearing that her death would spell disaster for her small children, a relative of her approached Bhagavaan Ji to save her. He is reported to have smoked his 'Chillum' for a long time and thereafter declared the patient to be out of danger. Soon thereafter the lady recovered fully and led a normal life. One of his devotees was having some problem with his heart and stomach and the treatment was ineffective. One day he was sitting before him and of his own he told him that his heart and stomach had been renewed. He was healthy again and the clinical tests later confirmed that both his organs were functioning normally. It is reported that another devotee of his once broke the head of his femur. He was brought before him in a stretcher and Bhagavaan Ji kept him in his anteroom for a few days. One day he entered the room, helped him stand up on his legs and take a few steps. After a few more days he walked back to his home. The mere presence of the saint had cured him without any surgical operation. In November 1966 Pran Nath Ji's father was reported to be bleeding profusely from his nose. Bhagavaan Ji gave some dry tealeaves and directed that a decoction of these mixed with sugar be given to him. The directions were carried out, the bleeding stopped and he was normal by the following day.

There are quite a few anecdotes where poor and needy persons approached him, narrated to him the dire financial crises they were in and begged of him to come to their rescue so that the marriage of their daughters is solemnized without any hindrance. Bhagvaan Ji would empty his cloth purse and dole out to them whatever little money there was in it. This would open a floodgate of funds for them and their proposed marriage function would pass off without any problem. This is also true of his paying a Rupee each to the Sadhus coming to Kashmir on pilgrimage. Thereby they would get the required money from unexpected quarters almost instantly after accepting the Rupee from him. There are eyewitness accounts of his having delayed the death of some people by a day or a month so that there is no hindrance in the impending programme in their household. Normally a saint like him would not like to interfere in the *'Karma-phala'* or the fruit of actions of any person but benign and merciful as he was, he could not let

others suffer because of a destined death. Therefore he would intervene and so to say, order *'Yama'*, the god of death to suspend his work for a specified period.

He is reported to have caused rain when it was most needed and swept away the clouds when he felt that the resultant rain would be detrimental to somebody's interests. There are innumerable stories narrated by people who were close to him about his benevolence in removing the worries, suffering and anxieties of people and in making things easier for them when the odds were against them. He advised a devotee of his to shift to his home in Srinagar lock stock and barrel, from Baramula where he was posted. Surprisingly he got transfer orders and moved to Srinagar just before the tribal raid sponsored by Pakistan took place in 1947 that caused large-scale migration of people in distress from the Northern parts of Kashmir. There are numerous stories about his having foretold events and forewarned about future happenings either directly or indirectly so that any possible mishap was averted. Such acts cannot be categorized as miracles performed to establish some sort of superiority. These acts show the benign and compassionate nature of the sage whose heart would melt to see the suffering and misfortune of a devotee or a person approaching him with faith and hope.

Shri Chuni Lal Kaul has narrated an occurrence to which he was an eyewitness when he was still in his school. He had gone to see Bhagavaan Ji and seek his blessings to pass his examination with good marks. Presently he saw an elderly woman along with his daughter enter the room. The daughter was suffering from an abnormal abscess on her breast and was in an agonizing pain. She fainted in the room and her mother tossed her head against the wooden *'chowki'*(a small platform) of Bhagavaan Ji's *'Aasana'*, seat. He was as usual puffing at his 'Chillum' through a piece of cloth. With his eyes fixed on the sky and uttering some abuses through the window he beckoned the lady to bring forth her daughter. He cut off a piece from the cloth used for puffing the 'Chillum' and asked this to be placed on her swollen breast. She was also given some holy ash to be applied on the wound later. Shri Kaul was later informed that soon thereafter the abscess got burst at her home soiling profusely her clothes and bed linen with blood, puss and

other filthy oozing from it. A pinch of the holy ash was applied to the resultant wound, which started healing up by and by. On the advice of Bab Bhagavaan the girl was given cooked rice and some fermented drink ten times over and she recovered fully. This mysterious occurrence inspired Dr. Shamboo Nath Ghasi, under whose treatment the girl was, to be a regular visitor to Babji's place.

Bab Maharaj was very fond of music. One of the renowned musicians of Kashmir Shri Jagannath Shivpuri used to sing for him Bhajans, Sufiana Mausiqi maqams and he would listen with rapt attention. These singing sessions would continue throughout the night. Once in 1958 his one year-old son was taken very ill. He went to his residence with a request in his eyes about the suffering child. Babji put his legs on the windowsill one after the other and then muttered to himself, 'this child has to attend an urgent business elsewhere, it cannot linger on here'. The following midnight the child passed away. After three years Shri Shivpuri was himself suffering from duodenal ulcer and his wife would bring holy ash and some 'prashada' from Bhagavaan Ji and give it to him. One day she wept before Babji but he made a riddle like statement and said, 'The master had a few grains of moong bequeathed to him by his mother, which are now exhausted. So there is no danger hereafter.' He was referring to Shivpuri's mother who had died of duodenal ulcer, when he was only one year old. In due course he underwent an operation in the hospital and was cured fully.

The primary concern of a sage, however, is the spiritual uplift and establishment of righteousness, *'Dharma'*. Bhagavaan Ji also had these concerns uppermost in his mind. There are a number of his disciples who were initiated by him into a spiritual discipline that enabled them to realize the self, perceive the truth and achieve their goal. It may not be proper to name these fortunate persons; they may not approve of their names being divulged and may prefer to remain incognito. It is, however, on record that a Sikh gentleman, who had come from outside, Shri Bola Nath Handoo and Shri S.N.Fotedar received initiation from him. The last named gentleman happens to be his biographer and has described in detail his own experiences of spiritual guidance that he received from him. He was fortunate to have had proximity to Bhagavaan Ji for over two decades. Although there are three prescribed ways of

obtaining initiation from a preceptor, *'pranipata, pariprashna tatha seva'* surrender, enquiry and service, it seems that only two of these were needed to attract him and obtain his grace. These two were *'pranipata, seva'* surrender and service, as there was no need for intellectual enquiry or scholarship and erudition to receive spiritual guidance from him. He was in favour of a method of reflection and contemplation *'Vichara'* and not of discourse and discussion, *'Pravachana, Vada-vivada'*. Bhagavaan Ji himself had, it seems, traversed through the stages of *'Sameepya, Saroopya tatha Sayujya'* or proximity, similarity and identity. No doubt his favoured disciples would have at least achieved the position up to the first two stages of proximity and similarity, if not the exalted position of the ultimate merger, the identity.

He was very disturbed if someone lost his head after reaching half way. In one case he is said to have warned a person not to be trapped by his ego on achieving some spiritual success. He did not pay heed to his warnings and eventually perished. This proved beyond doubt what Kabir has said long back, *'Kabira faqeeri door hai jaise lambi khajoor, pohnche uper to piye amrit ras gire to chakna choor* – The spiritual pursuit is like a tall date tree. If you reach the top you taste the nectar but if you fall midway you perish'. It is reported that one lucky gentleman had received direction from the Divine Mother that he should seek initiation from him. He did approach him and got spiritual guidance from him. In the history of Indian sages and saints there are so many stories and anecdotes where in some cases a preceptor was directed by the Divine to guide a specified disciple and in other cases a seeker was directed to approach a particular saint to seek initiation. This has happened in the case of Shri Rama Krishna Paramhamsa and it has happened in the case of Krishna Kar and Reshi Peer. Prof. J.N.Sharma has summarized the teachings of Bhagavaan ji in these words: 'All that exists is God incarnate and OM is its root. Meditating on OM removes the ego. Realisation of God can come by discretion, hard work, the Guru's guidance and surrender to him, (*Viveka, Parishrama, Guru-kripa, Sharnagati*). One should act upon what the four Vedas and Shastras lay down. Maya, the delusion, can be overcome by non-attachment. Lust should be avoided to attain spiritual bliss. One should think of Brahman as a tree and sit on any one of its branches, goal is the same'. This compares well with

the illustration where God realization is likened to a mountain-peak, which can be reached by taking any of the many paths leading to it from different sides of the mountain. Some compare the various paths of seeking the Truth with different rivers and the goal of self-realization with the mighty ocean, towards which all these rivers flow and in which all these get merged.

Initiation and spiritual guidance apart, there have been quite a few fortunate and favoured ones who have seen a glimpse of the Divine in one form or the other by his grace. It has been reported that when he asked a particular person to accompany him to Hari Parvat, he agreed on the condition that he is shown a glimpse of the Divine Mother. Bhagavaan Ji agreed and the party left for their destination. They had their usual business there and in between a small girl appeared and was offered something to eat. At the end of the visit the gentleman complained that the promise was not kept. When Bhagavaan Ji revealed that the small girl was none other than the Divine Mother herself the gentleman almost swooned. In 1946 a party of Bola Nath Handoo and his family accompanied by Bhagavaan Ji went on a pilgrimage to Swami Amar Nath. On the day of the Darshan of the Ice-Lingam at the cave Bola Nath Ji instructed his daughter to look in the direction in which Bhagavaan Ji was looking. The point of concentration was just above the lingam and below the ceiling of the cave. Three heads of Lord Shiva, Mother Parvati and Lord Ganesha were clearly visible. The party had the divine vision with his grace and had the unique darshan of the trio. Innumerable persons used to go for Bhagavaan Ji's darshanas, each one for his own reason. Some came for worldly matter and others for spiritual guidance. Some of the prominent persons who are known to have been regular visitors were Master Zinda Kaul, a leading poet, Master Shankar Kaul Pandit, a well-respected teacher, Pt. Shridhar Joo Dhar, retired Conservator of Forests, Pt. Shyam Lal Bhatt, a reputed Hakeem, Pt. Shambhunath Bhan, Pt. Gopi Nath Dhar, Pt. Amar Nath Daftari – all his devotees. Since Shankar Kaul Pandit was old and infirm Bhagavaan Ji used to send him 'Prasada' on his birthday. One year it was not sent and he concluded that his end was near. The same year Pt. Shankar Kaul is said to have died.

A question is often asked whether a saint can change the '*Prarabdha*' or the destiny of a person. Shri Krishna has said in the

Gita *'Yo me Bhakta sa me priyah* – one who is devoted to Me is my beloved'. Once a devout commands the love of the Lord, he is in a position to get anything done through Him. There is a story about the sage Narada. He was once going to 'Vishnuloka' when he happened to pass through a township. A couple living there desperately desired to have a child. They requested Narada to give them a boon so that they got a child. The sage told them to wait till he enquired from Lord Vishnu. The Lord told him that the couple was destined to remain childless. He conveyed this to them but they did not give up their hope. They approached another saint who gave them a boon and in course of time they begot a son. After many years Narada happened to drop in the same house for alms and was surprised to see their son. He was furious when he was told how they had got the child and in a rage he went to Vishnu to complain about his having been let down by the Lord. The Lord explained that He was duty-bound to keep the word of His devotees, who are dear to Him. Narada instead of recommending a child for the couple had made only an enquiry whether a child was in their destiny. On the other hand the other saint had straightaway ordered, so to say, that a child be given to them and the Lord immediately accepted his command and blessed the couple with a child. This mythological story illustrates that the accomplished saints can, if they so desire, give any boon and fulfill any desire of their beloved devotees. Ordinarily, however, they would desist from interfering with the nature or tampering with the destiny. These may be termed as their miracles or the manifestation of their compassion or their concern for the suffering humanity. We can get anything at their lotus feet but it depends on us whether we seek transient impermanent pleasures of worldly nature or eternal and limitless bliss and joy of the spiritual realm. To illustrate this it may be stated that once a devotee came to him with a huge number of fresh lotus flowers brought from the Dal Lake. At his insistence Bhagavaan Ji remained motionless – in fact he went in '*Samadhi*', engrossed with the Divine, while he decorated the Master with these flowers from top to toe in his own choicest way. In order to oblige him and give him the benefit of deriving supreme pleasure he remained in this position for hours together. What better example of selfless love and ecstatic devotion one can give. Yet these acts give eternal joy to the devotees, after all there is a thin line of demarcation between love and madness.

CHAPTER X

The Enchanting Symbols

Ascharyavat pashyati kaschidenam
Aschryavadvadati tathaiva cha-anyah
(Some see it with awe and others speak of it with wonder)

There are hundreds of people, men and women who have been fortunate to have had a glimpse of Bhagavaan Ji in his embodied form. There are innumerable devotees who throng to various Ashrams to offer prayers in front of the statues or life-size portraits of the saint. There are multitude of others who in the cozy solitude of their homes enjoy the literature relating to this great spiritual personality, sing songs and hymns in his praise and invoke his blessings for happiness, success and prosperity. There are many others who are engaged in '*Sadhana*' on the lines prescribed by him, away from the din of the mundane life and without any fanfare. There are fortunate few who are able to see him even now in his astral form. These lucky people while remembering their mentor surely associate certain things with him and identify his personality with certain prominent items as his enchanting symbols. There are a number of these items, which have a distinct identity and connotation. We know there are three aspects to anything in this universe, a name, a form and a certain attribute inherent in it, '*Nama, Roopa, Guna*'. Bhagavaan Ji was given the name Gopi Nath (Master of Gopis) by his parents as any child gets his name in our society. Little did they know that he would become master '*Nath*' of his innumerable devotees, '*Gopis*', in course of time. He grew from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth and from youth to a mature manhood and attained a form, which almost like a flash comes to mind as soon as we remember him. Similar is the case with his traits and features, which have been discussed and elaborated elsewhere in this biography. These are also inseparable part of the personality of this great saint of the twentieth century.

The first glaring and dazzling symbol that attracts our attention is his white turban. After getting fresh in the morning the first thing he did was to tie a white turban. It is said that during his last days in this world there was a stock of unused new turbans,

which lasted up to the last day; the last one was tied by him on the morning of the fateful day of 28th May, 1968. Turban is a symbol of respect although a true yogi as he was, he was indifferent to the notion of respect and disrespect. Shri Gita says, '*Samatvam yoga uchyate* – yoga consists in equanimity and equilibrium'. Even so he commanded a great deal of respect among his disciples, fellow saints, regular and casual visitors and the members of his family. This respect bordered on intense love, supreme trust and unflinching faith. The white colour is the symbol of purity, piety and truth. No wonder Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom adorns white clothes, has a white swan as her mount and has a white lotus for her asana, '*Ya shweta padma-asana* - one who is seated on a white lotus'. Bhagavaan Ji adopted this colour as he was pure and pious in all respects. He gave this message of purity and piety to all those who came into contact with him. He attached a great deal of importance to chastity and good moral character, which is again represented by white colour.

The next thing that attracts attention is his typically Kashmiri dress – a coloured '*Pheran*' with a detachable lining called '*Potsh*'. It is a set of loose garments with a lot of capacity to cover and conceal anything, be it a firepot called '*Kangri*' to warm up in winter or a big coconut that he once put inside under his armpit at the shrine of Swami Amar Nath. Symbolically this dress denoted that he would provide cover, shelter and protection to his beloved disciples, he would conceal the ailment of the suffering humanity and he had ample capacity to absorb and then ward off any impending misfortune on the country. These are symbolically the functions of '*Pidana*' and '*Anugraha*' or covering and revealing of the Divine. Here again the outer garment was coloured while the inner was snow-white indicating the purity of heart and soul, the truth and the essence concealed for the knowledgeable to seek and perceive. Yudishthir has revealed in the Mahabharata that the essence of righteousness is always hidden, '*Shrutih vibhinnah smratir-vibhinnah Dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayam* – There are different explanations given in revealed scriptures and other texts and yet the essence of righteousness seems to be hidden deep under a cave'.

Bhagavaan Ji's tilaka on his forehead is not only very

prominent and attractive but it is also bewitching and captivating. It is no less radiant than the third eye of 'Mahadeva' and resembles the *'Sharika-shila'* of the Chakreshwara shrine. This red tilaka with a pinch of ash in the middle denotes the vision of the past, present and the future called *'Trikala drishti'* that he possessed and with the dint of which he was able to foresee events and forewarn about the impending calamities. Lord Shiva was one of the deities he worshipped and it was his name that he uttered along with his last breath at the time of giving up his gross frame. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have a prominent symbol of Shiva's third eye in the form of a shining tilaka on his forehead. Significantly the shape of this tilaka on his forehead was rather oval symbolizing the cosmos that he was one with. Since it resembled cosmos indirectly, therefore, it connoted order and discipline needed in our life.

'Chillum' and 'Dhooni' are the two other items, which come to our mind as soon as we remember him or talk about him. Both carried fire, one in his hand and the other in front of him. The one in his hand represented the fire of the divine intoxication ever burning within him. The one in front of him represented the fire of the flame of light and knowledge that he was radiating all around. He used to keep the fire in it kindled always so that there is enlightenment for us all. This is in keeping with the prayer in the Vedas, *'Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya* – pray lead me from darkness to light'. Sporadically he would put oblations of a variety of things, jaggry, dry fruits et al, into his 'Dhooni' and propitiate different 'Devatas' – all for the good of the mankind, simultaneously cleansing the environment and spreading the scent and aroma in the atmosphere. It is very clear that the spiritual experiments of Bhagavaan Ji were clothed in mundane activities and traditional rituals. It is because of this belief that whenever he kept his 'Dhooni' ablaze for many days continuously he did not allow any one to touch it or interfere in any way unless otherwise so directed. Sometimes the 'Dhooni would remain lit round the clock and extraordinary items would be offered as oblations *'Ahuti'* collected from specific selected centers and places. Shri Pran Nath Koul has stated that once he was sent to Ram Bagh to collect certain items of oblation and the fire was kept ablaze for a number of days. Bhagavaan Ji said that *'Trikoti devata'* (literally three crores of

different gods) were propitiated by these oblations.

The tong was another item always in front of him. It was used to adjust the fire in his 'Dhooni', kindle it and put the burning wood together. Occasionally he is reported to have thrown it at some people and sometimes he would chase away someone holding a pair of tongs in his hand and running after him. His disciples who helped in keeping the fire on would also handle it. The tong is very symbolic in as much as it has two open ends on one side and the two arms joined together at the other end. The two open ends depict dualism of the individual soul, *'Jeevatma'* and the universal soul, *'Paramatma'*. The joined end on the other side shows non-dualism or the merger of the two, which is the high point of *'Sadhana'*. The pincer, on the other hand represents a struggle between the noble aspect, *'Daivi Pravritti'* and the ignoble aspect, *'Asuri pravritti'* going on all the time in the mind of a seeker and the effort it requires to overpower the latter so as to ensure that the divinity manifests in our thought, word and deed. This is symbolic of the crossroad of life where one has to choose the right path. This tells us to conquer *'Papa'*, the sin with *'Punya'*, the virtue. The Sama Veda says it in this way, *'Setuns-tara, akrodhena krodham, satyena asatyam....* Cross this bridge, conquer the rage with calm, conquer the untruth with truth.....and so on.'

The holy ash of the *'Dhooni'* was the coveted *'Prasada'* one could desire from this great saint. It was a unique medicine that cured so many diseases. Some would put it on their forehead and others would smear it on their body. Some would put it on their tongue and some would gulp it along with water. It represented, on the one hand, the impermanence of the mundane and on the other, pointed to the ultimate essence of every element, animate and inanimate. It also signalled towards the *'Vibhuti'* of Shiva, the supreme because of which He is called *'Bhasmadhara'*, attaining whom has to be the focal point of our spiritual quest. That is the *'Shambhavi avastha'* described by Shaiva scholars of Kashmir. That is the state where the seeker merges with the Divine. That is the state, which Bhagavaan Ji was himself in.

Flame is the symbol of the eternal light or *'Prakasha'* that represents *'Parama Shiva'*. It is said that Bhagavaan Ji would not like the *'Dhoop'* or the *'Agarbati'* in a smoldering conventional form.

He would like to keep these in flame. The ever burning 'Dhooni' before him, either in an iron sigri or the firepot was once described by him as extra-ordinary as it was the abode of 'Trikoti Devatas' or the multitude of gods, representing various shining facets and powers of the 'Brahman'. 'Devata' is defined as *'Dyotnat devata'*, what shines is Devata. It is not for nothing that the fire is also called *'Hutavaha'* in Sanskrit. It means the carrier of the oblations. All the oblations that we pour into the sacred fire in the name of different Devatas are carried by it to the respective planes of those Devatas, enabling us to reap the benefit of these oblations made with devotion and reverence. Flame also denotes the inner urge of a seeker to seek, know and attain the ultimate Supreme Truth. Flame is also the focal point of meditation, *'Dhyana'*. Flame is the light within and the light without, which is hidden and which we have to perceive.

Portraits and pictures of many Hindu gods and those of Guru Nanak, Rama Krishna Parama Hansa and Swami Balak Ji Kaw adored the walls of the room where Bhagavaan Ji used to live. These not only created a divine atmosphere but also conveyed a message that all paths lead to the same goal. Whether one is a Shaiviite or a Vaishnaviite or a Shakti worshipper, the goal is the same and that is the ultimate merger with the Divine. The Gita says: *'Yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktah shraddhaya-architum-ichchhati, tasya tasya-achalam shraddham taameva vidadhami-aham* – whatever form any devotee with faith wishes to worship, I make that faith of his in that very form unwavering and steady.' There was a rectangular piece of lignite or some other material resembling lignite with layers in it, which he held in his hands. Over a period of time he slowly engraved on it a picture of Mahakali. Later he smeared it with 'Sindoor'. Mahakali represents the eternal time and his carving out a portrait of the Goddess shows how much importance he attached to the eternality and immortality. Himself he was above all this, on a higher plane where there is no conception of time or space. In the words of the Vedic Rishi the position of the Divine is, *'Ati tishthat dashangulam* – He remains higher by ten measures'. The Kashmir Shaiva scholars also have described the Divine in similar terms, *'Vishwatmikam tad-uteernam* – He pervades the universe and yet remains above it'.

In his room there used to be a stick with a horn-like head as also a trident, *'Trishul'*. He used to keep a rosary of *'Rudraksha'*(a special sacred bead) on the head of this stick. Very occasionally he would wear this rosary, *'Rudraksha Maala'* himself; we can spot it in some of his pictures and photographs. Both these items are significant. Stick is the symbol of discipline. He was very particular about discipline in all matters. He often said that people of indiscipline get cursed before they get a chance to correct themselves. It is a fact observed by all of us that no *'Shasana'*, instruction or directive is of any use without *'Anushasana'*, decorum or discipline. In fact the word literally means carrying out the instructions. If we take a cue from this symbol and imbibe in our lives discipline both in worldly and spiritual matters, we certain shall be successful in attaining our goal. As regards the trident it connotes so many things. It represents *'Tri-Karana'*, Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the sustainer and Shiva, the destroyer. It indicates *'Triloka'* the three planes of *'Bhu, Bhavah* and *Svah'*. It refers to *'Trigunas'*, the three attributes of *'Sattva, Rajas, Tamas'* or light,passion and darkness. It shows the three phases of eternal *'Kala'* or time, *'Bhut, Vartaman, Bhavishyat'* or the past, present and future. The trident has a long handle, which reminds us of the Supreme that creates, controls and ensures order in the cosmos and which is at the centre of all this otherwise cyclic in nature. Trident is also the weapon in the hands of Shiva and obviously it should inspire us to remember him and concentrate upon him all the time. We have conceived the Divine in His different forms, figures and incarnations. Each of these has a symbol to remind us, inspire us and attract our attention. The bow of Rama and the discus of Vishnu, the flute of Krishna, the maze of Hanumana, *'Modakas'* of Ganesha, *Veena* of Saraswati and the trident of Shiva, all are in this category. In addition we also have two postures of the hands of gods and goddesses. One is straight and upright called *'Abhay hasta'* the hand that gives us fearlessness and protection. The other is inclined downwards called *'Varadahasta'* or the hand that gives us boon so that all our needs are fulfilled. The two together cover *'Yoga'* and *'Khshema'* of the Gita, which the Lord has promised to take care of in the case of all his devotees. The rosary of *'Rudraksh'* is a recognized symbol of *'Dhyana, Dharna'* or meditation and contemplation. Telling its beads all the time attunes our breathing

to uttering the name of the Divine while inhaling and exhaling. It makes us feel the presence of the Lord around us and enjoy the divine proximity. Putting the rosary atop the stick, Bhagavaan Ji was communicating that disciplined and concentrated meditation will lead us to the Supreme Truth.

As has been stated at many places one of the main things given out to devotees from this seat of piety was the holy ash. This was from the '*Dhoop*' that would be burning all the time. This holy ash was given out in a special paper with silver lining. Bhagavaan Ji would call this paper '*Asmaen So'n*' or the 'gold from the sky'. The holy ash was of grey silvery colour, the paper in which it was dispensed was also with silver lining. Obviously it had some special significance not known to us, the men of ordinary prudence. Either the idea was that holy as it was, the ash should be distributed with due reverence or the silvery colour would lend additional strength to the holy ash and make it more effective in removing ailments and pain. Even otherwise silver, '*Rajata*' represents purity, piety and reverence. This is an indication to all of us that we must imbibe the qualities of purity and piety in our demeanour.

Again there is the '*Paduka*', the wooden shoe with V-shaped grass straps that was at the doorsteps waiting to be worn by him whenever he wanted to go to the ground floor or move out. In later years, however, he would wear canvas shoes. The '*Paduka*' has been preserved at Pamposh Ashram at New Delhi for the devotees to have their 'darshan' and worship. So have his dresses been maintained for us to derive inspiration from. This is customary for the devotees of any sage to worship his footwear and is called 'Paduka poojan'. It gives us a feeling that he is very much there in front of us, guiding, inspiring and leading us on the path of spirituality and watching us with his benign yet penetrating eyes. We are naturally enveloped by a sense of possession and feel protected and cared for. Shri Makhan Lal Kukiloo, a well-known Sanskrit scholar and an ardent devotee of Bhagavaan Ji has composed a hymn in Sanskrit, '*Paduka Stuti*', a hymn to the footwear of the master.

Shri C.L.Moza has quoted S.N.Fotedar, the biographer of Bab Ji as having revealed a very interesting experience of his. He had imagined about the colour of the spiritual halo of his master,

thinking that every prominent saint had a halo of his own. While sitting before him he saw a bluish halo encircling Bhagavaan Ji. The halo was visible for quite some time and then slowly faded away. May be many other devotees had similar glimpses of the halo of Bab Bhagavaan. In case we meditate in front of a portrait of his we are certain to view this holy spectacle and perhaps *'Samaadhi'* may be easier to achieve. While he would emit vibrations from various parts of his body, these symbols of his would radiate light, *'Tejas'* for all of us to get illumined. Incidentally blue is the colour of intelligence and wisdom that he referred to as *'Vichara'*. Let us all aspire to be *'Vicharvaan'* or thoughtful, intelligent and wise persons as our master wanted us to be.

These symbols are very important and useful for any seeker. In fact the idol worship is all about symbols. We place some portrait, *Moorti* or a pious thing before us at the time of worship. These items enable us to concentrate and from there we take off, as it were, to the supreme heights of spirituality. Particularly in devotional worship, *'Bhakti'* these symbols play a significant role. We sing and dance before these symbols and see the Divine not only in them but also in every one around. To put it in the Sufi parlance, these symbols help us to rise from *'Ishqe Majazi'*, the material love to *'Ishqe Haqiqi'*, the true love. It is praiseworthy on the part of the devotees to have preserved various items like his dresses and his *'Paduka'*, the wooden footwear for everyone to pay obeisance. Devotees have painstakingly brought some of these items from Srinagar at the time of their forced exile as a result of the onset of the militancy in early 1990. These have been preserved at various places and various 'Ashrams' and these give solace to hundreds of devotees and inspire them on the path of *'Sadhana'* or the spiritual uplift. The effect of these symbols on the devotees could be explained somewhat like this, in first person:

- Clear before my eyes flashes every item related to my Master, his *Chillum*, his *Dhooni*, his pincer and tong, his *Pheran*, his Turban and his *Paduka*. Like a soothing rainbow these items appear on the canvas of my vision. I am healed of care and woe. I am withdrawn from the constant thought of 'I' and 'Mine'. When I concentrate my eyes on these items a soothing calm descends on my

mind. My legs involuntarily tread on the path of spirituality. Time stands still and refuses to move forward. Deep within me stands my Master, inspiring and guiding me. I see a blue halo behind his head and the white turban jeweled with flowers of all hues. He converses with me in silence. His gaze illumines my path. His transcendental being glows. I feel free in him and safe in his hands. My head bows in reverence, my hands join in salutation and my eyes close with devotion. My limitations vanish and I experience eternal, universal and immortal existence full of joy and bliss. I feel that I have been transformed into an ocean from a brook, a flame from a spark, a forest from a tree and a galaxy from a lone star.

CHAPTER XI

Experiencing the Mysteries

Agadha-sanshayambhdhi samuttaranatarineem
(The boat that can ferry us across the great
ocean of doubt and disbelief)

There is a saying in Sanskrit, '*Keshavah kaivartakah* – Lord Krishna is the boatman, who ferries us across'. The Lord is not always there in His embodied form nor is His incarnation there every time. Obviously, therefore, He carries out this function of His, any function of His for that matter, through someone. This someone is the *Nimitta* or the instrument or the means. Whenever we are in difficulty or in distress we approach a saint in whom we have trust and faith. Through him we invoke the grace and blessings of God Almighty. These saints in the height of their spirituality are one with the Divine and are, therefore, in a position to order anything, execute any command and fulfill any desire. Since these things happen unexpectedly and to everybody's bewilderment, they appear to us as mysteries or miracles. Bhagavaan Ji's life is full of such incidents where things have occurred in mysterious ways, sometimes at his own free will and sometimes at the behest of his devotees. This phenomenon continues even now when he is no longer in his embodied form. Many fortunate persons have witnessed these happenings. Some have narrated them while others have preferred to remain silent about it. Surprisingly some of these people who are testimony to these happenings have not seen or met this great sage of our times. Subsequent to their experiences they have identified him with a picture of his or with his statue adorning the 'Ashram' at Srinagar, Jammu or Delhi.

Science may not accept these for it bases all its conclusions on logic, reasoning and calculations. Beyond all these there is the realm of faith and belief and the spirituality carries us through this realm. Where reasoning fails faith succeeds. After all science has made enormous contribution but only for our small needs. It is the spirituality that caters to our major needs and helps us perceive the essence. So many people are witness to a number of occurrences and incidents, which at the face of it appeared to be mysterious

but all the same were made possible by the benign presence of Bhagavaan Ji, or his will or as a result of his compassion. Sometimes these things happened and were noticed. Sometimes these remained unnoticed at the time of their occurrence but were realized and understood later on, when the reality dawned on those affected. The full account of such happenings have been narrated by some, written about and described by some and some have merely perceived these and felt grateful to that great soul fondly called 'Bab'.

Bola Nath Handoo was a childhood companion of his and a man of spiritual achievements in his own right. Once he and his family went on a pilgrimage to Swami Amarnath along with Bab. His grandson, B.N. Handoo Upkari has described many mysterious events that occurred during this trip. Some of these are reproduced here.

At Chandanwari:- Motilal, a boy accompanying the group fell ill and had a very high fever. Consequently Bola Nath Ji wanted him and his mother to return to their home in Srinagar. Bab, however, did not agree. He gave the boy some tea left over by him to drink. The fever was gone and the boy was fit enough to traverse the whole route on foot. Around midnight Bab suddenly got up and summoned Bola Nath and some others to accompany him. They ran after some pilgrims who had gone ahead on a wrong and dangerous route. Soon they caught up with them and brought them back and guided them on the right path.

At Wavjan: - The pilgrims had camped here for the night. Suddenly the sky was overcast with menacing clouds and they apprehended rain and showers that would cause devastation. At the request of his sister Bab had a puff of his 'Chillum' and then addressed the clouds with these words, '*Hupaer aava, yapaer neeriv* – You came from that side, now you go away this side' and in no time all the clouds drifted away and the entire sky became clear. When the pilgrims surged ahead towards Panchtarni, Bhagavaan Ji remained behind. It was very hot and on an enquiry from Bola Nath he said that he was trying to get some rain. He remonstrated that rain would spell disaster but he assuaged all his misgivings. The pilgrims proceeded forward and the rain followed them all the way cooling the weather without causing any harm.

At the cave: - Bab remained seated about three steps below the Ice-lingam. He took a coconut in his hand and withdrew it inside his 'Pheran' and held the coconut under his left armpit and concentrated on the idol. When he took out his hand there was no coconut there, the Lord had accepted the offering from his beloved saint.

Shri Handoo has some other interesting events to narrate. His father Narayan Joo was under orders of transfer from Anantnag to Baramula, in 1947. He was relieved immediately as his relief was a very influential person and eager to join at Anantnag. He went to see Bab, informed him of the transfer and sought his blessings. To his utter disbelief, Bab told him that he could not be transferred, saying *'Timan anan gasa raza karith* – they will be tied with grass-ropes for transferring you'. Next morning he went to Anantnag to take leave of his boss. His boss informed him that he had to rejoin his earlier post as under the latest government orders no employee was to be dislocated, as an emergency had been declared in the state. During 1948-49 their family along with Bola Nath and Bhagavaan Ji arranged a boat-trip to the Mughal gardens. Some fishes were purchased for cooking and Prabhavati, wife of Narayan Joo began cleaning these fishes. Bab was busy with his 'Chillum'. Suddenly he took a dead fish in his hand, placed it in his lap for sometime and then threw it in the waters of the Dal Lake. To everybody's astonishment the fish regained life and swam away.

In 1954, sometime before his death, Bola Nath and his daughter called on Bab. He prepared his 'Chillum' and Bab had a long puff so much so that a blazing flame appeared on it. He then asked him to look into a *'Gadvi'* (a metal pot) full of water. Thereafter Bab blew into it so hard that almost half of the water in it spilled over. Immediately it started raining on the courtyard side while it was quite dry on the riverside. He continued blowing into the pot and when the remaining water fell off it rained on the riverside while the courtyard side was all sunny. On the day Bola Nath Ji died Bab had left his residence at Reshi Mohalla and had gone to the house of Pandit Ramjoo at Hari Parbat. There he was speaking aloud to himself, *'Amis diyiv Naraan Bhanaen jay, amis chhuna kenh hisab dyun* – Give him the honoured position of Narayan joo Bhan

(Bab's father), he need not account for any of his actions'. Apparently he was referring to his comrade Bola Nath, whose death he could see even though he was not present there. Once Bhagavaan Ji accompanied by Bola Nath ji proceeded to the shrine of Maharajna at Tula Mula. On the way suddenly he said that his right arm had broken. Later it transpired that his younger brother had died in an accident almost at that very moment.

Shri S.N.Fotedaar, a disciple of his and his biographer has described many such mysterious incidents, which either he was witness to or which were narrated by some other devotees. It is said that he had foreseen the Pakistan sponsored tribal raid on Kashmir that took place in 1947. That is why he had advised a devotee of his to shift all his belongings to Srinagar from Baramula, which was one of the major places badly affected by the enemy action. Later, however, he was transferred to Srinagar before any damage was done. The Hindus of Kashmir organized a *'Chandi yajna'* (a special type of sacrificial fire held for a specific purpose) at Hari Parbat to pray for peace and safety. He went there and assured those present that there was no danger as he was himself present at the battlefront. Later he muttered to himself, *'what is the army doing? They get so much rations and yet they do not open a direct route for the Lamas of Ladakh to Kashmir'*. Very soon after this remark made by him the Army conquered the Zojila pass and Kargil and thus a direct link with Ladakh was provided. During these operations Bhagavaan Ji lived at Reshi Mohalla. He was seen gesticulating and pointing to various directions while seated at his *'Aasana'*. There at the front an officer reported that he had seen a mysterious person directing the front ranks to fire in a particular direction, which proved to be decisive. The description of the person given by him to one T.N.Dhar of Rainawari matched with Bhagavaan Ji. So the officer was escorted to see him. He was thrilled to see him and confirmed that it was none other than him who had made the victory possible against all odds. It is also reported that during this period he fasted. One day he had a clean shave, broke his fast and was relaxed and the same evening the capture of Zojila pass was announced.

Shri S.N. Bakshi has narrated another anecdote of that period. He says that Shankar Nath Zadoo approached him and appealed

to him that he should come to the rescue of '*Batas*' (Kashmiri Pandits) as the tribal-armies from Pakistan had raided Kashmir and they were the targets. His first reaction was 'Is there really a *Bata* there?' Perhaps his observation was that Pandits of Kashmir had ceased to be '*Batas*' (the honoured ones) as they no longer were righteous as before. On Shri Zadoo's insistence he asked him whether he was prepared to sacrifice his own life for the community. His answer was in affirmative. Thereafter he asked him to put his fingers in the holes of the wooden mesh-window of his room called '*Panjra*' in local language. He did so and remained in that position for over an hour. Kashmiris were saved but Shri Zadoo's mental balance was disturbed for a few years. At the behest of the saint he had tendered sacrifice for the community.

He had likewise foreseen the Chinese attack in 1962, while he was on a pilgrimage at the shrine of Bhadra Kali. Excepting his sister and one disciple he sent all others away to their homes. Pointing towards Tibet he is reported to have said, 'don't you see what is happening across the mountains. A gale of wind from that side will blow you off your feet'. The attack took place and one night he left his home and returned after about an hour. When asked he said that he had gone to settle the matters in Tibet. It is reported that some of his disciples found his shoulders and back ice-cold, confirming thereby that he had just returned from the mountainous borders where the battle was on. A few days later there was ceasefire on the battlefront. Again in 1965 before the Indo-Pak war he would point towards the borders and say that there was '*Kaala*' or death in offing. During the currency of the war one day he got up suddenly from his 'Aasana' and muttered aloud whether he should save Delhi or Srinagar. He took out some candy, put a piece in his mouth and gave two other persons sitting before him a piece each. The enemy bombarded the Srinagar aerodrome but there was not much damage. An attempt was made to bombard Delhi also but the enemy bomber-plane was brought down somewhere near Meerut before it could cause any damage. Apparently Bab had given first priority to Delhi, the Capital of the country and also saved Srinagar city by and large with minimal damage to the airport.

Jai Kishori, a devotee of his has stated that in 1967 she had

gone on a pilgrimage to Hardwar. On her way back it snowed heavily blocking the Banihal Pass and stopping the vehicular traffic altogether. She remembered Bhagavaan Ji and next moment the only bus that was allowed to surge ahead was the one in which she was travelling. No other vehicle was able to cross over after that single bus. On reaching Srinagar she went to see him. He smiled and pointed towards his shoulders and said that he had to carry her bus on his own shoulders. Makhan Lal Tutoo, a businessman was on the look out for a shop. He was unable to find one and, therefore, proceeded to seek the blessings of Bab. On reaching Chandapora he came to know that he had given up his mortal frame. He felt dejected and accompanied the funeral procession. At the cremation ground, while sitting on the ground, he went into a sort of trance and saw Bhagavaan Ji leading him to a shop in the Lambert Lane. Eventually he got information about the availability of a shop in that lane on rent. He approached the man concerned and got possession of the shop – all due to the grace of Bab.

Shri Jawahar Lal Kak, brother of Somnath Kak was at Bombay when he got renal stone twice. The first time it was reported to Bab, he rubbed his own left side and declared that the stone had come out with water. In Bombay Jawahar Lal did pass the stone with urine. The second time he was operated upon and on regaining consciousness after the operation he was looking for a person in 'Pheran' with a turban on. He also said that this person was all along with him and had asked him to tell his mother to prepare '*Puries*', fried pancakes of 2½ seers of wheat-flour and send these to his residence. The family followed these directions, Bab was all smiles and had these '*puries*' distributed among all those present.

Shri Somnath Kak has narrated a very interesting episode that took place in 1960. He and his family members proceeded on a pilgrimage to Hardwar. Before leaving Srinagar he went to see Bab to get his blessings. Surprisingly, without any request from Shri Kak he gave him a packet of holy ashes. The party halted for a few days in the house of one Shri L.N. Zalpori at Delhi. Before they could resume their journey to Hardwar, Shri Zalpori's daughter was taken seriously ill with meningitis. Suddenly Shri Kak was reminded of the packet of holy ashes given to him by Bab. He gave a pinch of it along with water to her, which could not go down the

throat fully. He repeated the process till the girl was able to gulp the ashes-mixed water. It had the effect of ambrosia on her with the result that she not only regained consciousness but also was able to play with her playmates by the same evening.

Pt. Maheshwar Nath Qasba, a religious man was sitting in front of Bhagavaan ji one afternoon in 1966. He was apprehensive that he may not miss the evening *Aarti,* which he wanted to attend at the shrine of Tsakreswara at Hari Parbat. This thought was all the time uppermost in his mind while he was seated there. As the evening approached suddenly he had the full view of the shrine on the wall behind the sage, the vermillion-smeared stone slab, the Shri Chakra and numerous lamps aglow. He also heard every word of the *Aarti* being sung in the traditional manner, resounding in the room. The entire scene was mysterious because not only did the saint read his mind but also arranged to transform him spiritually to the shrine to be able to participate in the evening *aarti,* which perhaps he seldom missed.

Professor Kashi Nath Dhar, who became President of the Trust later, had never seen Bhagavaan Ji. Once he had gone to Chhattabal to be with a relation of his. One day he went to the market there to purchase some milk. On his return he lost his way and could not identify the right lane leading to the house of his relatives. In the process of trying to find his way he was heading towards the river when a Kashmiri Pandit with a *pheran* and a white turban on rebuked him for going that way. He led him on the right lane and he was able to reach the house of his relatives. Many years later, when he was appointed President of the Trust he had an occasion to go to the Ashram at Kharyar and he was amazed to see that the statue installed there resembled the man who had shown him the way although it is said that the statue does not completely match Bhagavaan Ji's features.

In the year 1947 raiders from across the border infiltrated into the Sindh Valley, where a Kashmiri Pandit was on duty. His wife was concerned about his safety and, therefore, she approached Bab to save him. His indirect reply was that there was danger to his life but she did not give up. She implored him to save her husband. The man managed to run away from that place, reached a place called Vayil and boarded a crowded bus from there. He was made

to travel on the roof of the bus. On the way due to the sudden jerk in the bus he lost balance and fell off the roof. He had a feeling that someone held him in his arms when he fell off the roof. Some onlookers took him to a nearby shop and offered him water to drink. He regained his composure and slowly walked home. He and his wife had no doubt that it was the unseen hand of Bhagavaan Ji that had saved him from the clutches of the raiders as also when he was tossed off the roof of the bus.

Dr. Kaushalya Wali has reported an incident about a well-to-do family, which was lacking peace of mind in spite of being in possession of all possible material things. Some members of the family went to see Bab at his place when he was busy pouring oblations into his 'Dhooni' and puffing his 'Chillum'. After some time he told them that they would get relieved on the following Monday. On that day there was some defect in one of the electric wires in a room. While this wire was being replaced a piece of paper hidden there fell down. It was found that someone had taken recourse to black magic to bring bad luck to their family as the paper had their painted images made on it and some ash in it. Once the paper was removed peace and prosperity returned to them and they were relieved of all their worries, as predicted by the saint.

Not only the events nearer home or relating to those who approached him, Bhagavaan Ji would sometimes foretell events that took place in distant countries and places. He is once reported to have cried aloud that a devastating earth quack was going to take place. All those present were apprehensive that there may not be an earth quack in Kashmir as it is prone to tremours. Then came the news that an earth quack of very severe intensity had taken place in Iran. Truly his vision was not bound by time or circumscribed by space.

Shri Opendra Karihallo was a devotee of Chaitanya Swami Ji, who had shifted from Srinagar to Bohri in Jammu in the wake of the militancy in 1990. He wanted to visit him but did not have his correct address. Somebody told him that there was an Aashram in that vicinity and may be he lived there. When he approached the Aashram that was then just a shanty, he met a person in a *'Pheran'* with a turban on and having a prominent *'Tilaka'* on his radiant

forehead. He treated him to a cup of Kashmiri tea, which tasted exceptionally sweet with the fragrance of almonds, cinnamon and cardamom. Shri Karihallo offered him the fruits he had brought for Chaitanya Swami ji but he declined to accept those and asked him to offer them to the person for whom they were meant. He guided him to the house where the saint lived. After a year his wife took him to Bhagavaan Ji's Aashram at Bohri, which had by then been developed quite a lot. He recognized the place and on seeing the portrait there, had no doubt that none other than Babji himself had entertained him the previous time he was there.

Shri C.L.Moza visited the 'Aashram' at Kharyar one morning and was meditating before the statue of Bhagavaan Ji. He was concentrating on his photograph by the side of the marble statue when suddenly he observed some movement in the right eye of the photograph. The eye closed and opened slowly and he was bewildered. Shri T.N.Kaul, another devotee corroborated Shri Moza's experience as he also had observed such mysterious occurrences previously. There was another person who had serious reservations about the concept of time as described in our scriptures. Bab Ji made him experience three lifecycles in a few hours during which he found himself reaching an advanced old age. This way the relativity of the time duration of human beings and Brahma was brought home to him.

Shri Nana Ji Pandit has reported an interesting recent happening at Kharyar. Sometime in 2001 a Muslim gentleman residing very near Durga Mandir at Kharyar had a vision of Bhagavaan Ji. He saw him on the lowest step of the river Ghat washing his metal-pot and taking a dip in the river Vitasta early in the morning. He saw him walking towards the ashram and entering his chamber there. Next day both his son and he had the same vision. They made an enquiry at the Ashram but were astonished when informed that nobody had opened even the door of the ashram during the previous three days. Since the concept of astral presence was beyond his comprehension, he was simply baffled. After a few days the saint appeared in his dream and directed him to fetch Hashish for him from the village Sogam in Lolab. He obeyed the directive, brought some quantity of the demanded item and placed it at the feet of the Master's statue in the Ashram with

reverence. Like Ali Mardan Khan who had recorded after a divine dream, *'Huma asle Maheshwar bud shab shahe ki man deedam* –He whom I saw during the night was none else than Lord Shiva himself', he must have proclaimed that no doubt he had seen the saint in his dream and none else.

May 5, 2002 was a unique day in that a strange occurrence took place on that day. The Peethadhipati of Poorvaamnay Govardhan Math, Puri, His Holiness Shankaracharya Swami Adhokshajanand Tirth Ji Maharaj was on a five-day tour to Jaigaon in West Bengal from 3rd to 7th May 2002 for an annual programme of *'Chandramauleshwar maharudrabhisheka* and consecration of 1¼ lakh Shiva lingam made of sacred clay. This is a unique feature of propitiating Siva undertaken by all the four Shankaracharyas as per pre-scheduled programme every year. This year the Peethadhipati of the Eastern Matha had programmed it at Jaigaon. On all the five days thousands of devotees attended the function and received blessings of Siva, the formless deity of the Advaita school of Indian Philosophy. Scores of Vedic scholars, Veda-pathees, Ganapathees and sadhus joined the function and participated in the prescribed rituals assigned to each one of them. These scholars and Veda-pathees represented all the four Vedas including the two branches of Yajur Veda, Shukla and Krishna. On the third day, 5th of May while the *'Maharudrabhisheka'* was in progress, chanting of Vedic Mantras was in full swing, Vedapathees were rendering Veda recitation in various *Prakriti and Vikrati-pathas* (different forms of Veda recitation), and the whole atmosphere was celestial, sacred and charged with purity and piety suddenly Bhagavaan Ji appeared on the scene with all his grandeur, radiance and majesty and was spotted by Shri Pran Nath Koul, a dear devotee of his.

Blessed are those present on the occasion to have had his darshan on such an august and sacred occasion. Devotees all over the world should be on the look out on such occasions and it will be no wonder they will find him present, only a discerning eye and unflinching faith is needed. One is reminded of the famous Sanskrit Shloka about Hanuman Ji. *'Yatra yatra Raghunath kirtanam, tatra tatra kritamastaka-anjalim, vashpa-vari paripoorna-lochanam, namata Marutim rakshasantakam* – Wherever songs in praise of Raghu Natha are sung, Hanuman ji is always present with bowed head

and tears of devotion in his eyes, let us bow unto him, who is the destroyer of the evil *rakhshasas*(evil elements)'. This Shloka shows that wherever hymns are sung in praise of Lord Rama, Hanuman Ji is always present there. I personally know a pious and devoted elderly lady who lives at Rana Pratap Bagh in Delhi. She used to see Hanuman Ji whenever she would sit and read Ramayana. One does not know whether Bhagavaan Ji's presence on these auspicious occasions is that of Hanumana or he is Shiva receiving the obeisance of his devotees. Whatever be the case one thing is certain that he is around whenever the atmosphere is divine and sacred. It is for us to benefit from his benign presence. I know it from a knowledgeable person, who has spent two decades at Shri Aurobindo Ashram, that Mother also had revealed having seen Ganesha, Hanumana and other deities from time to time.

The Divine can manifest itself in any form at any place and thus Bhagavaan Ji's appearance should cause no surprise. This reminds me of an interesting happening experienced by Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj at Vedanta Math in Calcutta. He had thought of having a golden throne made for his preceptor, Sri Ramakrishna. With this decision he took a casket full of gold in hand and started off towards the Jeweller's shop to place an order for the throne. As he was going down the stairs suddenly he heard somebody telling, 'Hey! What are you going to do? Stop it. Have you forgotten that I would not touch metal and you want to put me on a golden throne? Stop it.' He looked back and realized that it was none else than his Master, who had admonished him for this foolish act. He climbed back the stairs and put the casket in the locker. Thereafter, they placed an order in Mysore for a sandalwood throne. That throne still adorns the Vedanta Math at Calcutta. Swami Vijnanananda is on record to have seen Swami Vivekananda and other direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna while he was putting the relics on the alter and inaugurating and dedicating the new Belur Math Temple. This shows that it is not unusual for saints of high order to appear before their disciples and talk to them on various auspicious occasions. Let us not forget that the Supreme is not bound by any rules and can appear in human form directly or manifest His powers gradually in chronological order according to His desire.

CHAPTER XII

Influence on Men and Matters

Yadyadacharati shreshthah tattadeva-itaro janah
(In whatever way the great men act
it is exactly followed by others)

The characteristics of three types of persons have been detailed in the Bhagavad Gita, a Steadfast Person *'Sthitprajna'*, a Person loved by the Lord *'Me Priyah'* and a Person endowed with divine qualities *'Daivi-sampada'*. These characteristics are more or less identical and include poise, equanimity and equilibrium in the face of opposites, non-attachment, purity, altruism, straightforwardness, truth and absence of fear, ego and hatred. Once a person is master of these qualities and is loved by the Lord, he is bound to influence men and matters. Such persons not only can foresee the events, but also can mould the events in any form they desire. Once they feel inclined to grace a person they change the very course of his life and shape it in a pattern of their choosing. Bhagavaan Ji had been endowed with the necessary spiritual powers that he changed the lives of many a devotee. He gave different direction to many occurrences and made history even long after his *'Mahanirvana'* in 1968. During his lifetime too he could be present at some other place while physically he was at Srinagar. Once he told a lady that he had participated in the marriage of her daughter at Tulamula, while all along he was at his residence in Srinagar.

During a pilgrimage to Swami Amarnath the group of pilgrims with him was divided into two batches; one of the batches surged ahead and the second was following from behind. Surprisingly the members of both the groups observed him to be travelling with them. One is reminded of the two episodes in Shrimad Bhaagvat. Akrur Ji had come to take Sri Krishna with him from Gokul to Mathura. On the way he stopped the chariot and went to the river Yamuna to take a dip leaving the young lad on his chariot. When he dived into the water he found the Lord in the river. When he came out he found him seated on the chariot. This baffled him. Once a person asked the Lord to give him one of the Gopis. He agreed and asked him to take away any one not in the

company of Shri Krishna. He ran from pillar to post, from one Gopi to the other but saw Shri Krishna present everywhere, with every one of them.

Philip Simpfendorfer of Australia during his sojourn in Kashmir in 1975 recalled the Saturday when his daughter Helen was to marry Peter. The sky was overcast and the clouds threatening. It had started raining from the previous day. He went to his room and prayed to Bhagavaan Ji to take care of the happiness of the children, as it was an open-air wedding. Immediately the clouds got dispersed and there was bright sunshine till the function lasted. Again he had a glimpse of his during his meditation in February 1978. He told him that there is a need for people who will stand like solid rocks against the forces of destruction. Such people are called guides of humanity. Aashrams need to be linked with centres of power throughout the world so that the love and the circles of light for the well being of the entire world are ensured without interfering with religions. This incident took place about ten years after his 'Mahanirvaana'. After another eight years, in 1986 he gave darshan to another Australian devotee, Raymond Gordon of Sydney. He and another Australian, Yonne Houley both are ardent devotees of Bhagavaan Ji and are engaged in meditation on his pure light. His disciples are scattered all over in Australia, the USA, Canada, Switzerland and the Great Britain although he never left the boundaries of Kashmir in his physical form. This is an ample justification if at all one is needed, for him to be called 'Jagad Guru', Preceptor of the World.

In one of his articles on Bhagavaan Ji Philip has recorded his experience in these words: "In the dark of the night, somewhere beyond deep sleep, I sometimes glimpse awareness of his presence. He is not in human form, but his presence is unmistakable. Perhaps his body is an energy field, perhaps a vibration. It touches one of my subtle bodies with light. I suspect that it touches the whole earth because the presence does seem to pervade some rocks and caves and canyons on the bushland property where I live. Several years ago when I knew him more in his astral form, I asked where he really was, and the reply was to the effect that 'We are in the circle of the Shaktis.' The reply is still an enigma to me. Does it mean he is like the hub of a wheel and his emanation like the spokes,

connecting with the rim of powerful blessing as it whirls in energy paths across the earth? Nothing can block or stop the waves of power. All nature receives its good-ness as do receptive humans. To others, it just passes through them. It is an energy of infinite Consciousness." He has concluded with a significant remark that if all of humanity lived in Bhagavaan Consciousness, all creation would be open to infinity. He is sure that Bhagavaan Ji is constantly breathing his consciousness into us. If we also perceive the situation in a similar way any apparent miracle performed by our master will cease to be a miracle and will be seen as a natural and logical phenomenon, irrespective of whether the occurrence has taken place before or after his giving up the mortal coil.

It is by now an open secret and a matter of common knowledge that the officers and personnel of the Indian Army, who had never even heard of him saw him at the front during Kargil conflict with Pakistan Army, guiding them during the operations. These Army Officers have attributed the successful recapture of the Tiger Hills mainly to the directions they received from him during the counter assault launched by them. It was an officer of 18 Grenadiers, who first revealed how this mysterious saint of Kashmir directed the operation and how the commandoes acted according to his command with the result that the strategically important feature of Tiger Hills was snatched from the clutches of the enemy. The officer had heard about him from a Kashmiri Army Officer and had seen a locket in his neck with his photograph. It was because of this background that he had recognized the saint with a white turban and a red 'Tilaka' on his forehead. He vouched that in the first instance the Indian Army encountered enormous difficulties but after this great and mysterious saint appeared on the scene, the strategy was restructured and it bore fruit. He had no doubt in his mind that this success in recapturing this formidable and strategically all important peak was made possible by this unforgettable character emerging on the scene on July 3.

Credit goes to the well-known journalist Shri B.L.Kak, who while covering the ongoing Kargil war met the officer concerned at the battlefront and recorded his version of this mysterious event. In his dispatches to the press he had to be discreet, for obvious reasons, not to divulge the identity of the Army Officer. In his

graphic description the officer had narrated how Bhagavaan Ji had provided the lead, directed the operation and thus made the capture of this important hill feature possible. Shri Kak was under a great pressure to divulge the name of the officer but he maintained a calculated calm. The Officer had told him that his Kashmiri colleague in the Army had subsequently sent him a photograph of the saint and that had conclusively confirmed his identity.The officers in the Pakistan High Commission on reading an account of this happening made repeated attempts to know the identity of the Indian Army officer as well as the mysterious saint. They even approached some devotees connected with Bhagavaan Gopi Nath ji ashram at Pamposh enclave, New Delhi.

The higher echelons of the Indian Army also were curious to know more about this strange episode. They were informed that according to some war heroes this saint had already guided the forward ranks of the Army during 1947, 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan. There should be nothing surprising about this. Shri B.L.Kak has quoted Swami Yogananda as having recorded in his book, 'Autobiography of a Yogi' that 'yogis can materialize and dematerialize themselves and move with the velocity of light and utilize the creative light rays in bringing into instant visibility any physical manifestation'. Men of common prudence cannot, however, account for these things. It is perhaps because of this that the Army Officer has recorded in his diary that nobody would believe him when he would reveal that it was Bhagavaan Ji who led this 11-hour assault leading to the recapture of this dominating peak called Tiger Hills in the Kargil region that proved to be the turning point in the 40 days old conflict with Pakistan.

Some devotees of his who were very close to him have said that during 1962 when the Indian Army was engaged in halting the onslaught of the Chinese troops, one day he left his residence and returned only the next day. His body was cold and shivering and he had caught cold and was having the symptoms of bronchitis. When asked he replied that he had gone to Tibet border to settle scores. A few days soon thereafter there was ceasefire on the battlefront. When the decisive war of 1971, which created the separate country of Bangla Desh, was being fought, some devotees of Bhagavaan Ji prayed in his Ashram at Kharyar in Srinagar

throughout the day and begged of him to save the country. Bhagavaan Ji appeared before one of them in response to their prayers and directed him that a particular item should be offered by all of them jointly before the evening 'Aarti' by way of oblation for four consecutive days. After these four days there was an announcement on the Radio and Television by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India that General Niazi of the Pakistan Army had surrendered before the Indian Army and the war was over. This was his way of influencing the matters of his country even long after giving up his mortal frame.

Shri Dalip Langoo, a well-known singer of Kashmir saw him in a dream and he told him that he was planning to go to Delhi and settle at a place where there will be a pool of water. After the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, he came to stay with his relatives at Pamposh enclave. He saw the newly established Ashram there but did not find any trace of the pool of water, which he was looking for. He did, however, observe that there was an overhead water tank nearby, which had developed some cracks. In due course the tank was demolished and an underground water tank was constructed on the spot. Shri Langoo was amazed to find his dream come true and that Bhagavaan Ji had truly come to reside at this ashram, which has now a pool of water nearby.

Shri Avinash Pandita, an engineer and his wife, both are working. They live in East Delhi. They had kept some jewelry and cash in the locker of their cupboard at home and were waiting for the weekend when they would keep it safely in the bank. Ardent devotees of Bhagavaan Ji as they are, they had placed a photograph of the saint in the locker to safeguard these valuables. A burglar, who knew their daily routine, was on the lookout for a suitable opportunity to break open into their flat and make good with the booty. One day when Panditas were away and there was no one around in the vicinity he entered the flat and opened the cupboard and the locker with the help of some master keys. He collected the gold ornaments and the cash in a bag and calmly came out un-suspected. But our sage was there to protect the hard earned wealth of his devotees. As if from nowhere someone appeared on the scene, suspected the movements of the thief and raised an alarm. Some more people from the neighbourhood gathered, caught hold of the

burglar and handed him over to the police. The Panditas were summoned and they got their cash and gold back intact. This incident of 12th October 2001 has redoubled their faith in him and they are ever thankful to him for having saved them from a big loss.

Shri Autar Tikou has explained many instances when Bhagavaan Ji guided him and directed him to do things of sorts. He was in Geneva when our omnipresent saint appeared before him in his dream. Reluctantly he narrated his dream to some of his European friends. A lady acquaintance, on hearing that he had been directed to do something for the needy children, made a two-year's contribution unsolicited. He set up an organization and christianed it as 'Swamiji Association'. Within a week there were ten contributing members. Soon the numbers of children grew rapidly and in course of time 140 children were receiving assistance from the association. Our saint has infinite love and generosity and knows the agency through whom these are to be applied and in what way these are to manifest. Shri Tikou and a friend of his were looking for some gentleman in Jammu once, without having his address or any clue of his whereabouts. They went to the Bhagavaan Ji's Aashram at Bohri and found it closed. They had no other way but to remember him and as soon as they did, he sent them a guide to locate the person concerned. Mysterious indeed are the ways of these omniscient saints.

In an article on Bhagavaan Ji Shri H.N.Kaul has confessed that it was his wife, who introduced the saint to him. At first he was not very sanguine about the whole affair but then on a particular day a miracle happened. His son Ashish, whom he loved very much, suddenly doubled up in pain and his cries and shrieks were piercing. It was midnight and he was making efforts to call in a doctor at that odd hour. His wife, however, had her own agenda. She opened a small tin box, took out a pinch of holy ash from it and put the same into the mouth of the child. The stiffness and the pain gone, the child was his giggling self again within a matter of just five minutes. For Shri Kaul it was simply a mystery, which he could not account for. Strangely enough when he himself was writhing with pain due to the excessive consumption of liquor and cigarettes, his wife gave him a butt of a Charminar cigarette

although she would normally oppose his drinking and smoking habit. He smoked the butt and was relieved of the pain. Later his wife revealed to him that it was Bhagavaan Ji's leftover half-smoked Charminar. This, he admits, increased his curiosity to know more about him and he embarked on the quest in right earnest.

There were two girls who had both appeared in their B.A. examination and were waiting for the results. They were very close friends and both of them wanted to go in for teacher's training. Therefore they had decided to apply for B.Ed. course, then known as B.T., as soon as applications were called for and had entered into an understanding that whomsoever came to know about this would inform the other. Long after the last date was over, one of them came to know that applications had been called for. She was depressed and sad particularly when she came to know that her friend had already applied without informing her. Her brother took her to Bhagavaan Ji and the whole story was narrated to him. He consoled the girl with these words, '*Ma vad, chain jay tamis ta tasanz jay tse* – Do not cry. You will get her place and she will get yours'. After a few days some resourceful person helped her to have her application admitted with back date. Soon the result of the Degree course was out. She had passed whereas her friend had been placed in compartment. Consequently she got admission in the teacher's training course whereas her friend did not qualify for the same because she had not been able to clear the B.A. examination, a pre requisite for admission into the teacher's training course.

I was at Bangalore when the marble statue of Bhagavaan ji was installed at the Aashram in Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi. The organizers sent me an invitation card issued on the occasion. It had been posted three days earlier in Delhi when the security guard of the building where we resided handed it over to me. As soon as the card was in my hands a peculiar fragrance of '*Vibhuti*', the holy ash was there for me to inhale. I went up in the lift and handed over the card to my wife. Her immediate reaction was that it was emitting the scent of the '*Vibhuti*'. She handed over the card to our daughter-in-law, who also vouched for this strange phenomenon. We accepted this in all humility as the grace of the master, whom we had never seen or met. Many years back I had had a similar experience. My office was in Connought Place and I used to go up

and down by a chartered bus. The bus driver would play some cassettes during this journey, some film songs, bhajans and ghazals. The bhajans included a hymn in praise of the Sai Baba of Shirdi. Whenever this bhajan was played I would begin getting a strong smell of the '*Vibhuti*'.

At my home I have quite a few copies of the Bhagavad Gita including the cloth-bound one of my late father. Strangely enough only one of them, a pocket edition of the Gita published by the Gita Press Gorakhpur, would give out the scent of the '*Vibhuti*'. It was not, therefore, surprising for me to scent '*Vibhuti*' from the invitation card received in connection with the installation of the marble statue of Bab Bhagavaan at the Delhi 'Aashram'. I would not call it a miracle. I take it as his grace and as a reminder for me to lead a life of piety and righteousness. Such a reminder is needed in these times of diminishing values, when consumerism and commercialization has taken better of most of us and when transient pleasures attract us more than the eternal joy of spiritual experiences. I have had the pleasure of going to the Ashram at Pamposh on a few occasions. Every time it was a delight to sit in front of his '*Moorti*' and look at his beatific eyes. I am confident that one might approach him with all sorts of doubts and questions, but these upsurges of the mind often die down and vanish as one sits before his portrait, still and calm.

Shri Neelkanth Kalla was P.A. to Shri Harnam Singh Pathania. Both were devotees of the saint. One day Shri Kalla came to see him. He asked him whether his boss was well and whether he was going to Jammu. His reply was that Shri Pathania was well and was due to go on a tour to Jammu on the forthcoming Monday. Bab Ji gave him some candy by way of '*Prashada*' to be given to Pathania Sahib before he proceeded on tour. The instructions were carried out. On Monday he left for Jammu in his official jeep and drove it himself. His driver and two peons accompanied him in the vehicle. While they were crossing a small bridge built over a canal, their jeep was struck by another jeep coming from the opposite side and driven by an army officer. The jeep was lifted as it were, by someone and placed harmlessly in the Nallah below, without getting overturned and without any one being seriously injured. The jeep was rescued by the army and they resumed their

jorney in another vehicle. On his return to Srinagar Shri Pathania called on Bhagavaan Ji and expressed his gratitude for saving him. Our master was all smiles while blessing him.

A lady devotee has revealed on the condition of anonymity that she was once in conversation with a photograph of Babji hanging on the wall of her room. She asked him that if he really was a Bhagavaan why did he not physically appear before her. She went into a half sleeping - half dreaming state and observed him before her. With greatest affection and adoration she asked him if she should prepare a cup of tea for him. He said no but instead asked her to prepare *'Tahar'* – yellow turmeric rice. She expressed her inability to prepare that because there was no *'Tsarvan'*, sheep liver in her house that was needed for that dish. Bhagavaan Ji suggested that she could use Nutery Nuggets instead. After a while when she was fully awake and was pondering over the conversation, her father-in-law unexpectedly came from outside with a packet of Nuteries. This was rather unusual as he would seldom shop himself and as normally purchasing things needed for the household was the job of his son. As desired by Babji *'Tahar'* with *Nuteris* was cooked and taken to the Aashram as sacred *'Prashada'*. This establishes his omnipresence. Master Zinda Kaul, a famous poet of Kashmiri language, who was also a visitor to the saint has expressed this thought beautifully in one of his poems thus: *'Aend paekh ati chhu aasan boda bror Surdasan, bozan chhu mai laegith lolaek tarana vyasiye* – My friend! He is always around like the cat, which used to be always with Surdasa. He goes on listening with rapt attention the songs of love.'

Shri S.N.Fotedar has stated that Justice S.N.Katju was a great *'sadhaka'*, practsing *'Shakti'* worship. During his *'Sadhana'* he encountered some problems and did not know the way out. Sometime in 1975 he had a vision of Bhagavaan Ji, who addressed him thus, 'your preceptor and I are one and you have been kept under my care now. In fact your Gurudev and I have jointly chalked out your activities that you are carrying out under the guidance of Papaji.' According to Katju he had spoken all this in Kashmiri and had cleared the doubts in his mind. Thereafter he faded out from his vision and Katju opened his eyes. This is yet another instance whereby it is clear that if one is endowed with Bhagavaan-

Consciousness one can get spiritually connected with the master and get all the problems solved. He is all the time with his true disciples and at their beck and call.

Bhagavaan Ji had all through his life treated Smt. Prabhavati Handoo, daughter of Bhola Nath Handoo as his own daughter. After his 'Mahanirvana' she would go to his place early in the morning before the Sunrise and prepare the place earmarked for carrying out last rites customary during the first year of death, like '*Pachhavar*', fortnightly rites '*Masavar*', monthly rites and '*Shadmose*', six-monthly rites. One morning she was rather too early. Consequently when she knocked at the door there was no response. Thinking that the inmates must be still sleeping she was about to return when suddenly the door opened. She was amazed to observe that the person who opened the door for her was none other than Bhagavaan Ji himself. He asked her why she was going back having come all the way from her home. He ushered her in leading her way towards the specified room and then could not be seen any more. This not only showed his astral presence and his love for the lady but also his willingness to help his beloved devotees at any time and at any place.

CHAPTER XIII

In The Name Of The Master

Tasmat-sarveshu kaleshu
mam-anusmara yudhya cha
(Thus, you should all the time think of Me
And remain engaged in the struggle of life)

Shri Krishna expects us to be steadfast and endowed with divine qualities to deserve His love. Such people who fulfill these conditions dwell in Him and in turn He dwells in them, *'Aham teshu te mayi'*. Those of us who desire to be able to get the grace of Bhagavaan Ji have to seek the truth, imbibe the desired qualities, show care and compassion and think of him all the time. Let us, therefore, take stock of all that has been done in the name of Babji in the past, examine all that is being done presently and then ponder over what needs to be done in future.

During his lifetime itself Bhagavaan Ji had in a way chalked out the direction that the movement of spreading Bhagavaan Ji's message had to take. One day when the members of the Managing Committee of Durga Mandir, Kharyar approached him to seek his blessings, he not only blessed them but also contributed one Rupee towards their building fund, as if foreseeing that the place was to turn into a great centre of worship unto him and an *'Aashram'* of his. After his *'Mahanirvana'* in 1968 a band of his devotees decided to form a Trust to perpetuate his mission. The Managing Committee of the Durga Mandir allowed the Trust to construct the first floor of the building adjacent to the temple on the bank of Vitasta. Consequently a spacious hall was built and began to be used for daily *'Aarti'* and *'Pooja-archana'* from 1969. A marble statue of Babji was installed there in 1973 and the place turned into a hub of religious activities for the devotees, whose number swelled from year to year. Apart from the stream of devotees, the *'Aashram'* attracted a number of saints, sages and holy men of eminence. These included Swami Ranganathananda, the present President of Shri Ramakrishna Mission, and Gagan Gad Ji maharaj of Kohlapur, Maharashtra. The latter visited the *'Aashram'* twice during his *yatra*, pilgrimage to Swami Amar Nath ji between 1980 and 1990. It was

the unflinching faith of the successive Presidents of the Trust, various Trustees and Devotees with unwavouring dedication that made this *'Aashram'* a great centre of spiritual uplift and collective religious programmes.

Then came the holocaust of 1990, when the Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of their hearths and homes and an unprecedented en masse exodus from Kashmir took place. The devotees of Bhagavaan ji also migrated to Jammu, Delhi and other parts of the country and thus got scattered all over, including in some foreign countries. Consequently the activities at Srinagar Aashram got affected and almost came to a stand still. Whenever the mankind is in distress it has no other way than to turn to God and the Preceptor. The devotees, who had migrated to Jammu, prayed to their master to help them in this hour of grave turmoil. They continued their daily routine of *Aarti* and *Keertan* in private rooms till they located a piece of land at Bohri, Talab Tillo in Jammu. It had a ramshackle shed on it, which was given facelift and arrangements for collective *'Aaradhana'*, worship finalized. Funds were collected and people from all walks of life donated generously for the noble cause of constructing the *Aashram* there.

The foundation stone was laid in December 1992 and in a record time a two-storeyed L-shaped building was ready. It has a prayer hall, a place for *yajna* and other essential space for an office, a library, a kitchen and some bathrooms. The adjoining vacant area has been developed into a lawn. Here also a marble statue of the Master was installed in December 1993. During the construction of the *Aashram* Gagan Gad Swami Ji Maharaj of Maharashtra paid a visit to this place also, while on his way on pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi. He blessed the project and wished its completion without any hindrance or obstruction. On the day of the consecration of the *'Moorti'* a large number of devotees attended the *homa, pooja,* singing of hymns, *Aarti* and chanting of *'Om Namo Bhagavate Gopi Nathaya'*. This *Aashram* has now turned out to be the main centre of activities of the devotees living in and around Jammu. Devotees who live in far off places also come here occasionally to pay their obeisance whenever they are here to fulfill their social and domestic obligations. Some of them bring *'Prashada'* in the form of *'Tahar'* or *'Halwa'* or fruits for distribution among those present.

Bhagavaan Ji's birthday and Nirvana Day are also celebrated every year with due devotion and *homa* is also performed as per programme. Under the auspices of the Trust seminars, discourses and various other spiritual and social functions are organized not only to remember this great saint but also to inculcate the spiritual values and impart moral awareness among various sections of the society as also to spread the message of purity, piety and peace.

It is clear that Swami Gagan Gad Ji holds Bhagavaan Ji in high esteem although it is said that he had never met him. Physically they may not have met yet spiritually the two seem to know each other well. At the time the *Aashram* at Jammu was in progress Gagan Gad Ji is said to have foreseen that another *'Aashram'* would come up at Delhi in due time. Shri Dalip Langoo, a well-known singer of Kashmir has stated that Bhagavaan Ji in his astral form had told him in Srinagar that he was also planning to go to Delhi. A sizeable number of his devotees had migrated to Delhi and adjoining areas of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. There are many other devotees of his, who have been living in Delhi and have shifted to this place from Kashmir during the past five decades. All of them were keen to have a common place for religious functions and activities. It was, therefore, natural for these people to plan to have an *'Aashram'* in the capital city. The Kashmiris living at Pamposh enclave, predominantly a Kashmiri colony, donated a piece of land for the purpose. Initially a single storeyed house was constructed and a large life-size portrait of Babji was installed therein. His *'Paduka'*, wooden footwear was also placed there with reverence for devotees to pay their respects. The *'Aashram'* was operational from 1994 and soon the second storey also was added. In 1999 a marble statue of Bhagavaan Ji was installed at this place also. The place is sacred for hundreds of devotees. Daily *'Aarti'*, monthly *'Homa'*, *'Bhajan'* *'Keertan'*, celebrations of Bab Maharaj's birthday and *'Nirvana'* day are prominent features of the activities of this *'Aashram'* also. There are many devotees who throng to this place every evening, sit in a corner in silence, meditate and obtain the grace of their beloved preceptor. People bow in reverence at this holy temple place while passing by and many devotees seek the blessings of the Master here before embarking on their daily routine or going for some special assignments.

These ardent devotees are scattered in Delhi and adjoining distant areas so much that not every one is able to reach the '*Aashram*' at Pamposh enclave easily and regularly. These devotees gather at various places on auspicious days and join pooja sessions. Such gatherings have been taking place at Najafgarh, Noida, Gurgaon and other places. Some devotees felt that spreading Bhagavaan Ji's message, performing *Havan,* the sacrificial fire and singing in praise of this saint in spite of being of utmost importance and utility are not enough in themselves. They felt that something tangible needed to be done to mitigate the pain of the suffering persons, to provide succour to the needy and to cater to the needs of the poor in the fields of education and health. With these areas of service in view they established a Foundation in the name of the Master, knowing fully well that he himself used to alleviate the suffering of those who approached him during his lifetime. The formation of this Foundation was announced as a part of centenary celebrations during 1997-98.

A centre for the spiritual activities of the Foundation was accordingly established at Uttam Nagar, in West-Delhi. Devotees in large numbers throng to this centre as well for purposes of routine *pooja*, annual celebrations, *homa, Aarti, Bhajans* etc. as also to decide on and plan the philanthropic activities. The Trust is looking after the management of the three *Aashrams* at Kharyar in Srinagar, Bohri in Jammu and Pamposh in Delhi and also publishes a prestigious magazine 'Patrika' (Now named 'Shuddha Vidya). The Foundation manages the centre at Uttam Nagar in Delhi and publishes a quarterly journal 'Prakash Bhagavaan Gopi Nath'. Both these journals contain erudite, informative and scholarly articles on the life and teachings of the Master, on religious and spiritual topics, on philosophy and literature having bearing on spirituality, spiritual experiences of different people and devotional poems and articles written as offerings to Bab Maharaj. These journals spread the message of Bhagavaan Ji among young and old, men and women throughout the country and abroad. These articles are also available at inter net and are thus accessible to a large number of devotees.

Apart from these four centers established to spread the message of the Master, every home of a devotee is a temple in his honour. Wherever there is a group of such devotees, they choose a

common place, be it a temple in the neighbourhood or a community hall or even a room in any private house. Thereafter they assemble at that place, sing hymns and *'Bhajans'*, offer *'Aarti'*, perform *yajnas,* arrange discourses on religious and spiritual topics, chant the favourite *'Mantra'*, *'Om namo Bhagavate Gopi Nathaya'* or simply organize sessions of meditation. After such programmes in front of the portraits or photographs of Bhagavaan Ji, something or the other is distributed as *'Prashada'*. After the *'Poorna Aahuti'* in the *yajna,* a community lunch is served, which is partaken with reverence and devotion as a *'Naivedya'* from this revered saint. Reports of such celebrations have appeared in various journals and Newspapers from time to time and devotees have also narrated these events with a sense of joy and bliss. Imagine the State Government employees, who are required to move to Srinagar during the summer months, when the Darbar move takes place. They are lodged in Centaur Hotel and live under the shadow of the gun. Even here they celebrate important days related to the Master, perform daily *'pooja'* and *'Sandhya aarti'*, evening prayer.

In the HMT Colony at Bangalore a large number of devotees are residing these days. They organize various events, *Homa, Bhajan, Keertan* etc round the year with enthusiasm and gusto. A local Hanuman temple and the Hall adjoining it is usually the venue of these celebrations and people from all over the city join in these events. The turmoil in Kashmir has resulted in devotees of Babji getting scattered to far off corners and places. There has had a positive side as well of this otherwise a pathetic situation in that the devotion of the master has also spread in these far-flung areas. Reports of celebrations at such far off places as Leh in the North, Rajouri near the border, Calcutta in the East, Guwahati in the Northeast and Geneva in Switzerland have appeared in print from time to time. Devotees also organize functions on various auspicious days at Nagpur, Bhopal, Varanasi, as also at Noida in U.P and Vasant Kunj in New Delhi and Najafgarh in Delhi.

Mr. Philip Simpfendorfer has revealed that he met Bhagavaan Ji for the first time in 1978. He and his other friends have established a centre at Glastonbell. It took them 14 years to establish a beach-head of sacred land. True to the teachings of 'Bab Maharaj' they continue to have faith in their Christian religion and treat Jesus as

their Lord and Saviour. Simultaneously they consider Bhagavaan Ji as their contemporary guide, who transcends all the barriers of faith, religion, nationality and beliefs. It appears that the idea of these devotees is to establish a world city more or less like 'Auroville' established by the devotees and followers of Shri Aurobindo. At present people in thousands visit this centre but eventually they plan to build residences for hermits so that a world forum called 'Hagia Gaia' or sacred earth is established. It is here that these Australian devotees of Bhagavaan Ji have been celebrating his birthdays and other functions.

A number of philanthropic activities and programmes of service to people are undertaken and financial and physical help to the needy is provided by the devotees either individually or collectively in groups under the banner of organizations set up for the purpose, all in the name of their beloved Bab Bhagavaan. People have been contributing generously for such noble cause. This entitles them to his grace and '*Anugraha*' in every aspect of their lives. Yearlong celebrations took place during 1997-98 to commemorate the birth centenary of the Jagat Guru not only in India but also abroad. Functions were held at Glastonbell in Australia, Geneva in Switzerland, at London and Manchester in UK and at New Jersey in the USA. Different functions were held extensively within the country at Goa, Baroda, Bhatinda, Calcutta, Pune, Nagpur, Rajouri, Guwahati, Bhopal, Varanasi, Ajmer and many other prominent places. In the National Capital Region celebrations were held at Pamposh enclave, Najafgarh, Vasant Kunj and Ghaziabad. As has been stated already, it was as a part of these centenary celebrations that a Foundation in the name of the Master was created with the name 'Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji Charitable, Cultural and Research Foundation'. The Jammu Ashram also organized a number of functions. These included slideshows, workshops, seminars, discourses, painting and essay competitions, *japa, homa, kirtan* and other religious and spiritual programmes.

The high point of the centenary celebrations was the issue of a three-rupee commemorative stamp by the government of India. It was a unique gesture on the part of the government to honour the saint who was revered and loved by Kashmiris of all faiths but had not moved out of the valley even once. Mrs. Sushma Swaraj,

Minister for information and broadcasting and Communications released the stamp. The design on the first cover of the stamp was the creation of Shri P.N.Kachroo, a well-known artist from Kashmir and depicted the saint's ashram on the bank of the river Vitasta. The commemorative stamp was a tribute not only to Bhagavaan Ji individually but also to the galaxy of Rishis, who have contributed to the tradition of Rishi-cult and to the composite culture of Kashmir, which advocates tolerance and respect for all religious faiths and practices. The Minister, however, lamented that because of the turmoil, insurgency and militancy prevailing in the valley the centenary celebrations had to be held outside the valley, the birthplace of the great master. She also congratulated the Pandit community for having organized all these yearlong functions with devotion and dedication unmindful of their own troubles and tribulations. She also praised Kashmir's contribution to the spiritual values and ethos of the nation.

Another interesting feature of the centenary celebrations was that a function was held at Govinda Mandir on Newark Avenue in Jersey city, New Jersey on July 26, 1997. A number of important personalities from Indian and American communities attended the function. *'Nam-japa', Bhajans, Satsang* and erudite and informative speeches by a few prominent speakers marked the one and a half hour function. In a gracious gesture the mayor of New Jersey proclaimed the day as Jagadguru Bhagavaan Gopi Nathji Day. The speakers elaborated on the life and messages of the saint and noted that his message was a blend of Knowledge, action and love. In the pure Indian tradition the *'Prasada'* comprising *Puree* and *Halwa* was distributed among the devotees numbering about one hundred and fifty.

To inculcate spirituality among the youth and to encourage them to imbibe moral and ethical values, essay competitions on the themes relating to Babji were organized. As a part of service to humanity, activities like holding of blood-donation camps also were held at different places under the aegis of the Associations and organizations formed by the devotees. It will thus be seen that both the aspects of Bhagavaanji's message, spiritual and mundane were given due consideration. Whereas *'Satsang', 'Bhajans'*, chanting the sacred Name and *yajnas* were part of the spiritual activities, blood-

donation camps, feeding the poor and distribution of items of daily needs were the activities in the service of the mankind. It is imperative that such activities and programmes are continued so that more and more people benefit from the grace of the Master, there is peace and tranquility all round and love and brotherhood prevail.

Writer-devotees have not lagged behind in making their humble offerings to the Master. While erudite and thought provoking articles have been appearing in the Patrika, Prakash, Koshur Samachar and other journals, poets have composed hymns, Leelas and Bhajans in praise of the saint. Pt. Makhan Lal Kukiloo, Pt. Badri Nath Kalla and Pt. Chaman Lal Razdan have composed beautiful Shlokas in Sanskrit, full of devotion and love for the Master. A full-fledged Bhagavaan Chalisa has been composed on the pattern of Hanuman Chalisa. These writings are in English, Sanskrit, Hindi and Kashmiri. Noted poets including Naz, Sayil, Roshan. Amar Nath Dhar and others have composed beautiful lyrics, which have also been sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments. There are many audiocassettes of these lyrics and Bhajans sung by eminent singers. This is yet another way of paying homage to this great sage, who was himself a great lover of music. All these fortunate persons are the inheritors of his message and since they have an unflinching devotion to him they are also the recipients of his benign grace.

One thing is certain that the Master shall guide us in all that we wish to do in spiritual and worldly domain. Let us ask him what he wants us to do. We can do this by following the prescription of the Gita. ' *Tadviddhi pranipatena pariprashnena sevaya, upadekhshyanti te jnanam jnaninastatvadarshinah* – seek enlightenment by prostrating before him, inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The realized soul can impart knowledge to you because he has perceived the truth'. He is compassionate and kind. He will not let us down and shall give us wisdom, discrimination and intellectual acumen to tread on the correct path. Shri Krishna has given this promise, which ipso facto can be treated as the promise of our Master. ' *Tesham-eva anukampartham aham-ajnanajam tamah nashayamya-atmabhavasthah jnanadeepena bhasvata* – Out of pure compassion for them, dwelling

within their hearts, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of wisdom'. The only condition obviously is that Bhagavaan Ji must be within our hearts all the time round. Nothing will be impossible to attain and nothing will be out of our reach. We shall, with his grace and in his name, be able to raise ourselves spiritually and serve the mankind at large, considering it a service unto the Lord.

Swami Shraddhananda has said that a person who has seen God is a pillar of strength to society and a beacon light to all humanity. Bhagavaan Ji is such a person. For him religion was neither a compulsive dogma nor an irrational code of rituals. The purpose of religion according to him is to elevate humanity, to free us from selfishness and passion and to instill in us love and knowledge of God. Whatever we do in his name should not be merely mechanical observance of certain rules and should not overshadow the basic objective of bringing nobility of character and spiritual strength in the society. The hallmark of this consists in simplicity, humility, sincere relationship, authenticity of our spirit, selfless service, meaningful solitude and grateful celebration of his grace.

Tulsidas, the great *Bhakta-Kavi*, devotional poet and the author of 'Ramacharit Manas' has said that the name of Rama is more powerful and effective than even the embodied Rama. While the Vanara Sena was engaged in constructing a bridge to cross over to Lanka, every stone, every boulder thrown by them into the sea would float and remain in position, while those thrown by Ramachandra Ji himself would get drowned. This phenomenon has been explained by emphasizing that the Vanaras, led by Shri Hanuman would throw these boulders into the sea after uttering the word Rama with full faith. Rama himself would not utter his own name. The power behind his name was so significant that the stones would remain in the intended position so that a '*Setu*' bridge got constructed enabling the army of Shri Rama to cross over to Lanka with ease.

There is another story about a Brahmin engaged in penance in a hut. A milkmaid would fetch milk for him every morning from across the river flowing nearby. She would often be late that

disturbed the Brahmin's daily schedule of *'Sandhya'* and *'Tapasya'* in the morning. Angered by this situation he scolded her for bringing the milk so late. The woman told him that she has, on some days, to call the boat to her side of the river and then get ferried across, which delays her coming with milk on those days. On other days when the boat is on her side of the river she is invariably in time. The Brahmin said why wait for the boat, remember Rama and walk across. After all the name of Rama helps people cross the ocean of *'Samsara'*. From that day onwards she was never late. When asked for the reason she said that she does not cross by boat anymore but as advised, she utters the name of Rama and walks on the surface of the river water. The Brahmin was wonderstruck. He went to the riverside to try the formula himself. While attempting to cross he did utter the name of Rama but lifted up his dress a little lest it should get wet and started getting drowned. He was astonished why it did not work in his case. A voice from the sky spoke that the reason was his lack of faith on what he had advised the milkmaid while she had accepted that with full faith and trust. These two illustrations tell us that whatever we do sincerely and detachedly in the name of Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji with devotion, faith, trust and confidence is bound to meet with success. It does not matter that he is no longer physically with us. He is there always with us to guide us and to help us in our endeavour.

CHAPTER XIV

The Task Ahead, Spreading Bhagavaan Consciousness

Ya idam paramam guhyam madbhakteshu-abhidhasyati
Bhaktim mayi param kritva mamevaishyati-asanshayah
(He who with intense devotion unto Me, teaches this immensely profound Message of Mine to my devotees shall doubtless come to Me alone.)

Now that we have had an insight into the life of Jagat Guru Bhagavaan Gopi Nath, and a glimpse of his mysterious ways as also some idea about the message he has given us, the question to be pondered over is what is the task ahead for us to accomplish. The answer is quite simple. We have to strive to live up to his expectations in our worldly affairs as also spiritually. We have to carry his message to every nook and corner of the world for peace, tranquility and welfare of the mankind. This can be done by making an attempt to attain Bhagavaan consciousness and help our fellow men to do the same. This in turn raises two questions, what is this Consciousness and how can it be attained and made common among a maximum number of people.

Bhagavaan Consciousness is a state in which we think, speak and act big, pure and pious, we become practitioners of truth and adherents of *'Dharma'*. It is a state where we derive pleasure in living for others, in being kind and compassionate and in rendering detached service to the downtrodden and the suffering people. It is a kingdom of love and affection, a realm of peace and pleasure, where we are on the top of the world enjoying the supreme joy and bliss. During his lifetime people used to come to him and remain seated for hours on end before him without uttering a word. This would give them joy and satisfaction because they would be engulfed by this very consciousness during that period of stay in his august presence. People would watch him engrossed in his own world forgetting his surroundings, puffing at his *'Chillum'* and this phenomenon would lift them mentally and spiritually from their physical surroundings and take them to the plane of supreme bliss,

the abode of this consciousness. Devotees sing Bhajans, recite 'Stotras', engage in *'Nama-smarana'* or remember the Master by their dear **'Mantra'**, ***'Om Namo Bhagavate Gopi Nathaya'*** and get attuned to the wavelength of this consciousness giving them the desired eternal joy. The bliss and joy in getting attuned to this consciousness is, let us make it clear, eternal and not a transient pleasure obtained through *'Kamya-karma'* or desire and passion oriented deeds.

Every Consciousness has a wavelength just as every T.V. or Radio station has for its transmission. These transmissions are available round the clock but we are able to receive them only when we tune in our receiving sets to the appropriate wavelength of the desired station. In the case of Consciousness our intellect is the receiving set and our *'Sadhana'* is the tuning. Once we tune our intellect through our effort and bring it at par with Bhagavaan Ji we shall not only see him and perceive his presence but also be in a position to interact with him to seek solutions to all our problems. When we attain the desired consciousness we shall be able to visualize the ultimate unity of existence, seek enlightenment or at least a pointer in the right direction. Success in this endevour is no doubt a point of great joy, yet the effort towards that end is no less satisfying. What a Sadhu worshipping Radha-Krishna in Vrindavan once told Steven J. Rosen, an Indologist about Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is equally true of our Master. He said, 'Chaitanya was a volcano of love, erupting with the lava of spiritual madness.' Bhagavaan Ji also was a volcano of love, erupting with the lava of spiritual madness. Let us attain his consciousness and then love him in the same way as Radha used to love Krishna. Let us taste this mutual relationship of love till it turns into a transcendental explosion in which the two become one. No doubt this is tantamount to swimming against the tide but the effort is worth it. We have to choose between floating along the material conception of life or swimming upstream to spiritual enlightenment.

This plan of attaining Bhagavaan Consciousness should be the prime aim of our existence. The Bhagavad Gita says that there are four types of people who veer away from the spirit. These are 1.the foolish or ignorant, 2.the gross sensualists, 3.the intelligent whose intellect and knowledge are overshadowed by illusion and

4.those who are just evil. Surely we do not want to be counted in any of these categories. Let us be counted among the four types of the devotees enumerated by Lord Krishna by saying '*Chaturvidha bhajante mam*, four types of persons worship me'. These four types are: 1.'*Arto*' or the distressed persons, 2.'*Artharthi*' or persons who want material or spiritual wealth, 3.'*Jijnasu*' or sincerely inquisitive persons and 4.'*Jnani*' or earnest seekers of the truth. Because of the turmoil in which our community has been thrown since 1990 on account of the militancy and terrorism we are no doubt in distress. We are also desirous of wealth, if not spiritual, at least material wealth. We have to be inquisitive and earnest in seeking the truth. There is no reason, therefore, why we should not be true devotees. Here is a golden chance for us. Let us surrender to him and seek his grace. This will enable us to attain the blissful consciousness.

Two points are noteworthy about our Bab Bhagavaan. The first point is that quite often he would speak out what was in the mind of a person present before him. If the thought happened to be something critical it would embarrass the person concerned. If it was a request or a plea the person would get an answer or redress, mostly indirectly and sometime directly. This was possible because the saint had a universal consciousness. He was one with the Divine, who is the embodiment of immortal existence, '*Sat*', universal consciousness, '*Chit*' and eternal bliss and joy, '*Ananda*'. Our Master was in a position of spiritual capacity where he could, at will tune in the wavelength of any one present or even any person far away and then read what was in his mind. He would then decide if he needed to react. It may not be possible for us to straightaway reach that stage. To begin with we have to strive for attaining Bhagavaan consciousness, which will eventually lead us to universal consciousness. To attain that consciousness itself is a matter of intense '*Sadhana*' and we need to start it sooner than later if we crave for our Master's grace. This '*Sadhana*' will enable us to receive in various degrees, first the inspiration and then the reality from him.

There is a reciprocal dependence of our effort and his grace. If we put in our effort we shall receive his grace and if we are the recipients of his grace we shall certainly endeavour to achieve it in right measure. Jiva is consciousness defined by the principles constituting individuality. It is the embodied being limited to the

psychophysical states. Although this individuality never gets destroyed yet if we see it in relation to the all enveloping universal consciousness we shall be able to realize our true self. A logician would explain it by saying that every thesis has an anti-thesis and the two when blended become synthesis, which is a higher phase of reality in which the lower contradiction is overcome and transcended. According to G.W.F. Hegel everything in the universe is incomplete and insufficient, yet is a phase of reality. Everything is to be included and nothing is to be rejected. We shall, therefore, be well advised to accept our individuality, incompleteness and insufficiency and try to join it with the wider consciousness so that we are able to perceive the reality in its totality.

The second point is the worldview held by Bhagavaan Ji. This he had explicitly made known to his Australian devotee in his astral form. He advocated a close coordination between the well-meaning persons and associations all over the world in order to establish piety, purity and spirituality for the larger interests of the well being of the mankind. In order to translate this lofty ideal into action we have to work for the spread of this consciousness in every nook and corner. It is here that the collective efforts of the organizations, associations and '*Satsang-mandals*' formed in his name have to be pooled and service unto humanity has to be made the prime motto of their lives by all those connected with them. Bhagavaan consciousness is a heritage of all mankind and it helps us penetrate into the core of reality and revel in its beauty and joy. In fact it can be seen in the context of the Vedic doctrine of '*Tat tvam asi*' or 'That Thou art'. This in effect refers to subjective honesty and objective validity. In day-to-day language it means internal sincerity and external accuracy and this can be applied to all aspects of our lives, be it the moral, intellectual, aesthetic or mundane. In the spiritual realm it is no less relevant. Let us, therefore, popularize this message among the people from all walks of life.

Bhagavaan Ji was not interested in creating a sect in his name nor did he hanker after name and fame so that he would collect a hoard of people behind him. He was aware that the Truth was universal and what the sages did was not to say anything new but to re-emphasize the same old universal truth, of course each in his unique way. So while popularizing his message if there are any

apparent variations in the form, the substance has to be the same. This can be summed up in two words, *'Sadhana'* and *'Seva'*. *'Sadhana'* or meditation and contemplation to seek the Truth will form the subjective honesty of our life and *'Seva'* or service unto mankind – nay even unto the entire creation, will be the objective validity and the one will be incomplete without the other. Let us not forget that our master was an omniscient and eminent preceptor. He was gracious and compassionate and possessed divine prowess. He demonstrated all these qualities by dissolving miseries of different people, performing divine sport at times and by showing path to emancipation. By merging with the consciousness of such an extra ordinary saint we shall find ourselves in a realm of equanimity, loving kindness and sympathetic joy.

Kashmir has been regarded as an epicenter of spirituality. It is regarded as a paradise on earth not only for its rich natural beauty, which it is no doubt, but also for its inherent spiritual beauty. The frontiers of this paradise are to be widened by spreading Bhagavaan Consciousness in the world and bringing under its fold more and more people. A very praiseworthy beginning has been made at Glastonbell in Australia to find the essence of Kashmiri spirituality. They have expressed an eager desire to work in close cooperation with other organizations to see the glory of sacred Kashmir shining throughout the world. Similar centers need to be established in all parts of the country and in different countries abroad and then there should be a mechanism of close liaison and coordination between these centers. Let us make this a global movement and reaffirm that ours is a *'Sanatana Dharma'* or eternal movement for truth and righteousness, which does not accept any man-made barriers.

Let these centers be power plants producing electricity of spirituality, power of truth, energy of divinity and current of morality. It is not sufficient to have faith and pray. We must bring to light the how and why of it also. A formal belief in an ideology and a mere observance of its forms and rituals yield little practical aid. It is the personal commitment that taps the overflowing reservoir of spiritual power. There has to be a romance in life; the romance of vision and service. The thrill of life is gone if we think only of ourselves. Doing good to others gives meaning to our lives, creates music in our spirit and we begin to sing and dance inside.

Let us enrich these centers as our spiritual family for spiritual growth, to communicate truth, show light, inculcate character and strength and recharge spiritual batteries. Let every one of us be imbued with Bhagavaan Consciousness so that we are marching armies for the good of the mankind and these centers are not mere museums. Let us not argue about our relative greatness. Let us confine our activities to providing leadership with vision and spiritual vitality. Love and compassion will solve all the problems faced by the mankind in the contemporary world. The field of activity is vast and varied. Let every morning of our life begin with a resolve to do something good and something unique.

Our sages have remarked that in *'Kaliyuga'* men have a tendency to turn from total to fragmentary, from the profound to the superficial and from the spiritual to the material. Great contemporary thinkers have also bemoaned the prevalence of consumerism, commercialization and individualistic attitudes that have given rise to greed and coveting, hatred and fear, envy and jealousy. The sages have also noted the light at the end of the tunnel in that during this *'Kaliyuga'* one can achieve spiritual advancement with a minimal effort. Let us collectively try to reverse the trend and inspire people, who come under the banner of Bhagavaan consciousness, to grasp the eternal and not go after the transient, to perceive the total and not be lured by the fragmentary, to understand the profound and not be guided by the superficial and finally settle for the spiritual and not be attracted towards the material. As the old Chinese proverb goes, we should not mistake the pointing finger for the Moon. We shall have to break the shell if we want to taste the kernel. We must ensure that the tradition is adequate enough to hold our society together for if it is not our life will be in danger of facing the gravest crisis. The way to ensure this is through universal love even though some may discard it as utopian. Of course love has to be reinforced and supplemented by social structures and a collective ethos. After all, the world is a training ground for developing enormous capacities and the love is an emotional instrument for achieving it. Developed capacities make it possible for us to get as near as possible to perfection.

The Tibetan term for *'Dhyana'* is *'Gom'*, which literally means perfecting in us a positive, constructive and realistic attitude. This

is an important aspect of *'Vajrayana'* school of Tibetan Buddhism. With meditation we transform our thoughts and ideas to make them more compassionate and better tuned to reality. Again this compassion will stand us in good stead in the field of service and reality will dawn on us by intense *'Sadhana'*, the two together forming the core of Bhagavaan consciousness that we are discussing at present. One of the definitions placed on the term religion is 'Man's relationship with God and fellow men'. This definition also fits in the emphasis given in the movement that we call Bhagavaan Consciousness, on *'Sadhana'* and *'Seva'*. While *'Sadhana'* will perfect our relationship with *'Brahman'*, *'Seva'* will strengthen our bonds with our fellow men. In a higher plane, however, there is no difference between the Divine and His creation since creation too, in essence, is His manifestation only.

Robert Lawrence Smith has rightly remarked in his book, 'A Quaker Book of Wisdom' that these days people are judged by what they own and not by what they are. This is the root cause of the rampant materialism that we observe all over the world. The movement that needs to be launched and popularized in the name of our master has to reverse this trend and emphasize the importance of the durable human goods like truth, freedom, wisdom, humility, simplicity of spirit, non-violence, silent contemplation and service. For this we need inherent goodness, cultivated reflection and understanding as also natural sense of discrimination, to be applied in our daily life dauntlessly and with common sense. Above all a close coordination, collaboration and cooperation between individuals and institutions are also of utmost importance to see this movement succeed and bring lasting happiness to the mankind. Humanity is baffled in this pluralistic world, riven by ideologies sacred and profane. Religions are supposed to give us vision and wisdom, ethical and moral values, humility and veracity. Unfortunately the religions have been mortgaged to people with personal aggrandizement because of which barriers of dissention and walls of hatred have been raised. These walls need to be demolished and a level playing field created for the material and spiritual advancement of human race. Care has to be taken that there is no imbalance between the material and spiritual progress. The two have to go hand in hand in right proportion. While the

consciousness has to be stabilized at the appropriate level, any programme of service has to be carried out with equanimity and a total indifference to praise or blame, credit or criticism.

The programme of universalizing Bhagavaan consciousness has to be a movement, ever evolving with due regard to the times and circumstances. It should not be a struggle to make people believe in a set of doctrines or dogmas. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, the right approach is realizing, being and becoming and not just believing. Struggle it has to be but one that strives to become perfect and divine and to reach God. Swami ji has observed that, 'the soul is like a tiny boat in a tempest raised one moment on the foaming crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions'. Let us not be helpless in this current of cause and effect. Let us be masters of our destinies by being active partners in this movement. Let this visibly a small flame that was lighted in the valley of Kashmir be turned into a fireball of light, which shall illumine the entire mankind in course of time. This will prove the prophetic words of Raman Maharshi true in letter and spirit: 'When you truly feel equal love for all beings, when your heart has expanded so much that it embraces the whole of creation, you will certainly not feel like giving up this or that. You will simply drop off from secular life as a ripe fruit drops from the branch of a tree. You will feel that the whole world is your home'.

One thing is to be noted here that '*Sadhana*' and '*Seva*' have to go side by side. Bhagavaan ji used to emphasize the efficacy of '*Vichara*'. '*Vichara*' is the means to in-depth knowledge, both intuitive and direct understanding. It is a technique to join theoretical with the practical and to reconnect rationality with reality. '*Vichara*' or reflection for an average person is '*Jijnasa*', reaching out or an urge to know. It contains elements of both faith and science and thus appeals to continuity of consciousness and reality as also to the integrity of thought and deed. Thus it cannot be detached from service. Service cannot be de-linked from '*Sadhana*' either, for the two are inter-dependent as the theoretical and applied aspects of any scientific formula. The '*Shakti-upasaka*' or those who worship the Goddess often perceive her in four distinct forms, '*Shakti*', '*Mahakali*', '*Saraswati*', '*Laxmi*', or the Energy,

Eternal Time, Knowledge and Wealth. The last two are actually representing the theory and application of the same thing. While the former gives us knowledge of a discipline, the latter helps us put that knowledge to practical use and thereby earn wealth.

It has been noted that Bhagavaan Ji had a world-view of the things that will unite the mankind and ensure peace and happiness all over. For this he advocated the principles of *'Samadrishti, saravatmabhava'* or equanimity and fellow feeling. This he showed amply through his own example and not by precept. It may not be out of place to point out that one of the two definitions of the term *'Yoga'* given in the Gita is equanimity, *'Samatvam yoga uchyate* – yoga is equanimity and equilibrium'. Elsewhere also the Bhagavad Gita has enumerated the qualities of a learned one and included equanimity as one of these. *'Vidya vinaya sampanne brahmane gavi hastini shvani chaiva shvapake cha panditah sama darshanah* – A learned one has the same approach towards an intellectual endowed with knowledge and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a lowly person (literally a dog-eater)'. Thus in our movement of spreading Bhagavaan Consciousness *'Sadhana'* will inculcate in us the quality of *'Samadrishti'* or equanimity and equilibrium. *'Seva'* or service on the other hand is essentially based on *'Sarvaatmabhava'* or fellow feeling. In fact it is the fellow feeling and intense compassion and caring that inspires and induces us to undertake various programmes of service.

Bhagavaan Ji was often referred to as a 'Common Man's Saint'. Unlike many saints and godmen of the day he never gave any preference to rich and wealthy persons. On the other hand he had special regard for the pious, noble and spiritually inclined people. Like the Sapta-rishis, Devarshi Narada and other Rishis of the epic and Pauranic times he was ever present and willing to help, guide and assist any one without any discrimination whatsoever. He saw to it that a Muslim servant accompanying a devotee-lady got a bagful of fruits because he had craved to have one. He would enjoy listening to traditional classical music for hours on end, irrespective of whether it was presented by a Muslim or a Hindu Musician. He allowed a person of unstable mind because of excessive drinking proximity to him, even though many devotees present remonstrated, and kept him there till he regained normalcy. He

carried a devotee on his shoulders when he was unable to cross over to the other side of the water feature, while they were on their way to Tula Mula. This fortunate person was none other than Pt. Gobind Joo Koul, an ardent devotee of his and a pious soul in his own right. Shri Koul had been drawn to this extraordinary saint long before 1947 and was a regular devotee up to the last in 1968.

He was there when somebody's dear one departed to console and remind of the immortality of the soul. He was there to help the marriage of somebody's child get fixed and solemnized when the prospects were bleak for one reason or the other. He was unmindful of a cat sitting on his *'asana'* or a rat nibbling at his foot. He was present to cause the clouds to shower rain when it was needed to quench the thirst of dry land. He was there to redirect clouds to cause rain elsewhere when it was going to obstruct a function or a programme. One winter it was freezing cold. The water of the Dal Lake froze and the inhabitants of the valley were in great trouble. They requested him to do something. He threw off the quilt that he used to warm himself with and took a bath after a long gap. Next morning there was a thaw in the cold, ice melted, the weather warmed up and all the people got a respite from the extraordinary biting cold. It is reported that from that day onwards he never used the quilt. He gave a Rupee to a Sadhu or someone else and there was no shortage of funds for him. He emptied his cloth-purse to a needy and the required finances came from different sources. He delayed the death of a person till a marriage in his house passed off peacefully or till the arrangements for running the household were ensured. These are but a few examples of the compassion and caring of our Master and it is in this spirit of compassion and caring that we have to be ever ready for the service of the *'Janata Janardhan'* or the public at large, the manifestation of the Divine.

Scientific inventions and discoveries and technological developments have not only brought the countries of the world close to each other, but also have opened new vistas of knowledge that has placed greater importance on the spirit and soul. The new theories in the field of Physics like the Theory of Relativity and the Quantum theory have established the relevance of the ancient Indian wisdom and the importance of consciousness in human life and behaviour. It is the need of the hour that instead of the tolerance

towards different faiths and ideologies, we learn to accept and respect various view points as valid in their own right and acknowledge their efficacy at different levels of consciousness. There are three very important assertions made in the Vedas and other scriptures. 1.*Ekam sat viprah bahudhah vadanti* – One and the same existence and truth are described in many different ways by the learned. 2.*Udara-charitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – Those of magnanimous attitude view the entire world as a family. 3. *Yatra vishvam bhavati eka needam* – The world must become a nest giving equal shelter to all. In the light of these assertions and such profound doctrines, the message of our Master gains significance in that the religious organizations and the centers of worship all over the world should join hands to eradicate the darkness of ignorance and spread the light of knowledge, discrimination and wisdom so that the human race prospers in an atmosphere of peace, tranquility and brotherhood. Cooperation and coordination should replace jealousy and envy. Charity and sharing should prevail in place of greed and coveting.

Imagine a new world order where all good things of different faiths are adopted, all the moral and ethical values of different schools of thought are accepted as gospels and individual freedom and collective harmony are ensured. It is in such a world order that human race shall progress leaps and bounds, in material, mental, intellectual and spiritual fields in equal measure. This has been the dream of this saint whom we fondly call Bab Ji. This has to be the motto of the movement of 'Bhagavaan Consciousness', a concept evolved by some of his ardent devotees in late seventies of the previous century. Work on this programme is already in progress at important centers, at Jammu, Delhi, Varanasi, Bangalore and other places within the country and at Sydney in Australia, Geneva in Switzerland and New Jersey in the USA, outside India. It is, however, imperative that these separate efforts are pooled together and there is a coordinated programme launched and implemented in a planned manner all over the world. This will give the right direction to this movement and the resources can be put to a better use. Let there be no doubt that those who attain this transcendental Bhagavaan Consciousness shall get rid of the miseries of material life and shall have perennial joy and a steady intellect.

A Hymn to the Preceptor

'Kundan'

Hold my hand and lead me right
Let my path be true and bright.
Lull me in the lap of the Maa,
Known as 'Hari' and 'Sharika'.
Let my path be true and bright.

Give me the knowledge of meditation,
Tell me the secret of 'I' and 'He'.
Teach me chanting with each breath -
The eternal 'OM' day and night.
Let my path be true and bright.

The essence of 'Shri Chakra' I must know.
'Yantra' and 'Mantra' you may show.
I want to tell the beads of my mind.
How to make it a rosary, I want to find.
Let my path be true and bright.

I want a 'tilaka' at the feet of Ganapat.
I wish to circumambulate the Parbat.
At 'Devi aangan' I wish to meditate
Till I attain the 'Samadhi' state.
Let my path be true and bright.

Give me lessons in the Veda.
Teach me 'Shastra' and the Gita.
Let the meanings be clear to me,
In their depth and in their height.
Let my path be true and bright.

Show me His form, if He has one.
Tell me His secret, if He has none.
Baffled I am by 'One' and 'Two'.
All this confusion you may remove.
Let my path be true and bright.

How to burn my impurities at once,
With the fire of practice and penance?
So that the 'Kundan' is pure and free.
Remove the darkness, let there be light.
Let my path be true and bright.

(Translated from the original Kashmiri poem composed by the author)

Homage to Bhagavaan Gopi Nath

Hail India, the beacon light!
It is here that in different forms-
appeared God, the source of light.
Himalaya, the beauty in trance,
Where peace prevails, the self illuminates
And the waters of Ganga and Yamuna dance.
This land has seen the childhood tantrum
of Rama, Krishna and Gautam.
It is here that the saint Gopi Nath
came with the divine message, 'Om Sham'.
My salutations unto him.
May his coming augur well.
May the dust of his lotus feet
remove sorrow, sanctify the earth
and make it bright.
hail India, the beacon light!

(Translated from the original Hindi poem written and recited personally by Shri Sumitranandan Pant on 27th November 1976 on the occasion of the inauguration of Shri Gopi Nath Satsang Mandal at Varanasi.)

*भगवान् गोपीनाथ जी के प्रति श्रद्धांजलि

—राष्ट्रकवि स्वर्गीय श्री सुमित्रानन्दन पन्त

ज्योति भूमि जय भारत देश।
ज्योति चरण धर विचरे प्रभुवर,
जहाँ विविध धर वेश।
समाधिस्थ सौन्दर्य हिमालय,
शुभ्र शान्तिमय, आत्म-तेज-मय,
गंगा यमुना जल ज्योतिर्मय
हंसता जहाँ अशेष।
लोटे यहाँ धूलि पर ईश्वर
राम, कृष्ण, गौतम का तन धर
आए गोपीनाथ महात्मा
लाए प्रभु सन्देश।
श्रद्धांजलि अर्पित करता मन
मंगलमय हो दिव्य आगमन,
पावन करें धरा को उनके
पद रज कण, हर क्लेश।
ज्योति भूमि जय भारत देश।

*यह रचना राष्ट्रकवि की अन्तिम कविताओं में से है। इसे उन्होंने २७ नवम्बर, १९७६ को प्रयाग में भगवान श्री गोपीनाथ जी सत्संग मंडल के उद्घाटन समारोह में स्वयं पढ़ा था—

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Glossary of Sanskrit and Kashmiri Words

Agni (S)	Fire
Aananda (S&K)	Bliss or Joy
Aarati (S&K)	a form of Worship in which lighted lamps are waved while chanting hymns
Aasana (S&K)	a Seat
Aashram (S&K)	Holy Dwelling Place
Agarbati (K)	Incense
Ahankara (S&K)	Ego
Ahuti (S)	Oblation
Amavasya (S)	Moonless night
Amrit (S)	Ambrosia, or Nectar
Antaryami (S)	One who can read the mind
Anubhava (S&K)	Experience
Apta-kama(S)	One whose desire has been fulfilled
Aradhya (S)	One who is worshipped
Atagath (K)	Out of pocket money
Atma (S)	The Soul
Bab (K)	Father figure
Batta (K)	A Kashmiri Pandit, literally a learned one
Bagavaan (S&K)	God Almighty
Bhajan (S&K)	Devotional song
Bhakta (S)	Devotee
Bhakti (S)	Devotion
Bhasma (S&K)	Holy ash
Chai – mo'gael (K)	Tea – black
Chai - Sheerya (K)	Saltish with milk
Chillum (K)	Top of the hubble bubble, an earthen pipe to smoke
Chit (S)	Consciousness
Dakhshina (S)	Honorarium
Darahorai/ Dasdarad (K)	Debit and credit/give and take
Darshan (S)	To have a glimpse
Devata (S)	god or an aspect of the Divine
Dharma (S)	Duty, Righteousness, Truth, Attribute, Nature
Dharmashala (S&K)	Guesthouse for saints and pilgrims

Dhooni (K)	Fire for oblation
Dhyana (S)	Meditation
Gadvi (K)	A metal pot to keep water
Grihasta (S)	A Householder
Guna (S)	Attributes, Sattva-light, Rajas-passion and Tamas-darkness
Guru (S)	Preceptor
Ishta Deva (S)	A chosen Deity
Jagat (S)	The World
Jagad Guru (S)	Preceptor of the World
Jatadhari (K)	Sadhu with long flocks of hair
Jeeva (S)	Individual embodied soul
Jeevan Mukta (S)	Liberated during lifetime
Jnana (S)	Knowledge
Kangri (Kang'er – K)	Firepot
Kamini (S)	Damsel
Kanchan (S)	Gold or Wealth
Karma (S)	Action
Karma-phala (S)	Fruit of actions
Karana Deh (S)	Causal body
Khose (K)	An alloy cup to drink tea
Kripa (S)	Grace or kindness
Kundalini (S)	A dormant energy lying in a coil form at the bottom of the body
Lingam (S)	An oval shaped icon of Shiva representing Cosmos
Mahakala (S&K)	The Supreme Time or the god of death
Maha-Nirvana (S)	Leaving the mortal frame
Mantra (S)	A mystical phrase endowed with spiritual powers
Mastana (K)	Person in an ecstasy
Maya (S)	Illusion
Moha (S)	Delusion
Mohalla (K)	An area of habitat
Moorti (S&K)	A portrait
Naiveda (S)	something holy to consume
Nirakara (S)	Without form
Nirvana (S)	Emancipation
No't (K)	A pitcher

Paduka (S)	Wooden sandal
Panchang-upasana (S)	Worship of five aspects of the Divine
Papa (S&K)	Sin or a bad deed
Parikrama (S)	Circumambulation
Pheran (K)	A long robe
Pheran-potsh (K)	Long robe with detachable lining
Pooja (S)	Worship
Prakasha (S)	Light, enlightenment
Prana (S)	Life essence or breath
Prashada (S)	(see Naiveda above)
Prasthana-Trayi (S)	Three scriptures, Brahma Sutra, Upanishad and the Gita
Punya (S)	Virtue or a good act
Rasa Leela (K)	Devotional dance
Richa (S)	A Veda Mantra
Rishi (S)	A sage or a hermit
Sadhaka (S)	A seeker
Sadhana (S)	Spiritual exercise
Sakara (S)	With Form
Sama (S)	Songs of the Sama Veda
Samadhi (S)	Communion with the Divine
Samsara (S)	World of birth and death
Sanskara (S)	Attributes carried over from previous birth
Sat (S)	Existence
Shakti (S)	Energy, Energy aspect of the Divine
Sharan (S & K)	Refuge
Shishya (S)	Disciple
Shloka (S)	A Sanskrit verse
Shri Chakra (S)	A Tantrik geometrical symbol
Siddha (S)	An accomplished saint
Sookshma (S)	Subtle
Sthoola (S)	Gross
Stotra (S)	Hymn
Swami (S)	Master, a sage
Tahar (K)	Yellow cooked rice
Tejas (S)	Radiance
Thokur Kuth (K)	Private room for worship
Tilaka(S)	A Vermillion mark on the forehead

Tirtha (S)	A pilgrimage centre
Trikala (S)	Three dimensions of time, past, present and future
Trikoti (S)	Three crores, three hundred million
Trishul (S&K)	A trident
Tsarvan (K)	Cooked Sheep-liver
Upasana (S)	Worship
Vakh/Vakya (K&S)	A poetic composition
Vichara (S)	Thought or contemplation
Virakhta (S)	Detached person
Vitasta (S)	River Jehlum

Note :

S – stands for Sanskrit

K – stands for Kashmiri

Jagat Guru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji—Charitable, Cultural and Research Foundation has been set up to provide;

a) facilities for spiritual development by spreading Bhagavaan Ji's message of love, peace and universal brotherhood

b) relief to the destitutes and the disabled;

c) facilities for research on Kashmir's cultural heritage and its relevance to the modern scientific world society;

d) start activities of charitable nature like free medical aid, social counselling and vocational institutions.

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Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji;

(i) one with Brahman, embodiment of Consciousness and Bliss endowed with five faculties of creation, sustenance, merger, enfolding and unfolding.

T.N. Dhar, Kundan

(ii) directed, Indian Commandos on the hills of Kargil during the war of 1999 summer.

Daily Excelsior (J&K) B. L. Kak, Senior Journalist

(iii) in the lineage of Lord Rama, Bhagavaan Krishna and Mahatma Buddha.

Kaul Kalpatru 'Chandi' Sumitra Nandan Pant
Prayag (U.P.) Poet Laureate

(iv) one of the most eminent saints who ever graced India and the world, a curious blend of knowledge, devotion and action.

Asia Observer, (New York, edition)

(v) altered states of Consciousness, inspired harmonious living with nature and its powers, provided help to others in every day life and showed concern for humanity's well being. His devotees still find his presence with them. Without a physical body, he still lives.

Cosmos, Australia

(vi) exercises a spiritual power unequalled since the times of Jesus Christ.

P. Simpfendorfer, Australia

Commemorative postal stamp of Rs. 3 was released by Govt. of India, Departments of Posts during the birth centenary celebration of Bhagavaan ji.

Jagat Guru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji
Charitable, Cultural and Research Foundation, (Regd.)
New Delhi